

Excellence in Education

**2009 Indiana
Teacher of the Year**



Indiana Department of Education
Dr. Suellen Reed, Superintendent

STATE OF INDIANA

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
DR. SUELLEN REED, SUPERINTENDENT



INDIANAPOLIS 46204-2798

ROOM 229 - STATE HOUSE
AREA CODE 317-232-6665

November 2008

Dear Friends,

It is an honor for me to share the collection of philosophies from 63 outstanding Indiana educators. Statements from these educators describe what transpires in Indiana classrooms each day, and we can all be proud of their dedication and leadership.

Every day teachers change the lives of students by sharing a hug or smile, saying kind words, supporting their success, and encouraging students to pursue their dreams.

The lyrics to the song "For Good" from the musical *Wicked* describe our excellent teachers perfectly:

"... So let me say before we part
So much of me is made of what I learned from you
You'll be with me, like a handprint on my heart
And now whatever way our stories end
I know you have rewritten mine by being my friend..."

As you read the philosophy statements of the 2009 Indiana Teachers of the Year, remember a special teacher who left a handprint on you and inspired you to find your dreams. Each teacher honored tonight has been an inspiration to our children and colleagues.

As I continue my journey, please know that each and every one of you has left your handprint on my heart. Whatever way our stories end, I truly know that you have rewritten mine by being my friend.

Thank you for your support of the exceptionally dedicated educators who will lead and inspire our children into the future.

Sincerely,

Dr. Suellen Reed
Superintendent of Public Instruction

2009

INDIANA TEACHER OF THE YEAR

Tania Harman

South Bend Community School Corporation
Warren Primary Center

RUNNER-UP

Lorinda Kline

Warsaw Community Schools
Edgewood Middle School

FINALISTS

Stacy Baugh

Community Schools of Frankfort
Frankfort High School

Samara Newnam

Muncie Community Schools
Storer Elementary School

Mary Lou Cox

MSD of Washington Township
Eastwood Middle School

Denise Oaks

Fort Wayne Community Schools
Lakeside Middle School

Kevin Jehl

East Allen County Schools
Leo Jr./Sr. High School

Monica Plantan

Zionsville Community Schools
Zionsville Middle School

Elizabeth Murphy

New Albany-Floyd County Consolidated
School Corporation
Highland Hills Middle School

Kathy Wertz

Prairie Heights Community School Corporation
Prairie Heights Middle School

Janet Anderson
MSD of Warren Township
Moorhead Elementary School
Grades K-5 Music

“Good teaching practices cross subject boundaries.”

My teaching philosophy is simple. Simple, but not easy! To be an effective teacher you must be knowledgeable in your field, able to transmit that knowledge in an understandable, compelling manner, love your subject area, and most importantly you must care for your students.

I also believe it is important to remember that the best teachers are lifelong learners. The more we learn, the more we should realize how little we know. This is what gives me the strength to get up early on Saturday mornings to attend Orff or Kodaly Workshops. I hope to gain a new insight or technique that I can apply in my classroom. It is why I attend Indiana Music Educators Conferences and National Orff Schulwerk Conventions. It is also why I read recommended books on subjects other than music, such as reading literacy, best practices for teaching math, science and literature. Good teaching practices cross subject boundaries. My desire is to continually improve as a teacher and in every way possible help my students learn as much as they can.

Connecting with students in positive ways, letting them know I care about them, helping them feel safe, secure and successful is important to me. I

understand the necessity of developing a supportive atmosphere in the music classroom. I devote a lot of time and energy to building that climate by encouraging students to treat others the way they want to be treated. By being specific about what that looks and feels like, modeling the appropriate behavior myself praising students as they support and encourage each other, and discouraging negativity about themselves and/or others has resulted in developing an environment where children are most at ease and best able to take the risks necessary to learn.

The rewards I find in teaching are numerous. The rewards are smiles from new ESL students, who previously seemed so nervous about being in a new school with so many new students and teachers; comments from students about how much they love to sing, dance, and play instruments in music class or how much they enjoyed performing on the Warren Performing Arts Center stage during our end of the school year concert. It is seeing “regular” students encourage and assist students with special needs; seeing the face of a student with special needs beam with pleasure when sharing a song recently learned in music class with his classroom teacher.

It is a marvelous reward to know that I have inspired some of my students to pursue careers in music, especially careers as music educators. It is a great joy to know that I have helped to shape future educators by serving as a cooperating teacher to student teachers and as a mentor to new teachers who have gone on to become outstanding educators. My life is blessed beyond measure by having the opportunity to do what I love...sharing the joy of music with students for whom I care deeply.

David Baker
MSD of Warren County
Seeger High School
Grades 9-12 Speech and Theatre

*"I want to change the way my students perceive the world,
and their reaction to it."*

*Respect. Honesty. Compassion.
Humor. Enthusiasm.*

These five words are the core of my Mission Statement. I will respect the students and their ideas, opinions and goals, even when they conflict with mine. I will be honest with my students, even when this might be difficult for them to hear and accept because I want them to do the same for me. I will be compassionate in my daily interactions with my students in order to create a safe learning environment for all involved. I will keep my sense of humor—It's one of the best tools in a teacher's repertoire. I will be enthusiastic even when I do not feel like being enthusiastic, since I want my students to do the same.

I want to change the way my students perceive the world, and their reaction to it. I know speech is one of the most important classes my kids take that they are 100% sure they either will not like or do not need. The ability to communicate well is something that is very valuable in society. I want to help guide my students to the place where they feel comfortable speaking in front of a group. I want to help them start to think for themselves and make decisions based on their knowledge, experience and research as opposed to just

continuing to spit out what they have been told. I see the majority of my students leave the class with more confidence in themselves and their abilities. I see them go from quiet and unsure, to at least gaining enough confidence to stand in front of a group and impart their information. While that might not sound like a major breakthrough, some of these same students who started with an absolute fear of public speaking are able to overcome their fear just by getting to the front of the class. They are expected to know what they are taking about, and each week I try to challenge them in their opinions and beliefs.

They will think for themselves, and once they start thinking for themselves, they do not usually like to stop.

I feel it is important try new things. Not only if something is not working, but to get and keep the attention of my students. I will never learn what else works if I do the same thing over and over and over every semester. Plus, I get bored easily, so I change things to challenge myself as well as the students. I also want to be able to connect with my students on their level for some things. I cannot always expect them to do all the heavy lifting, I expect to challenge myself and make

an effort to use examples and references with which they identify. I also feel getting my master's degree was an important step in staying relevant and informed. I discuss theory and concepts with other teachers, and watch how they tackle challenges in their classes, or how they have dealt with a particular student or situation.

My mission is to help my students to not only be good public speakers, but to be better human beings. If I am able to overcome my challenges my students will see their abilities and overcome their own challenges. Once they get a taste of their own success in the class, it will carry over into their daily lives. School is not only about learning. It is also about growing as a person, and my job is to help guide them to be better people and to prepare them to go into the world and make it better for themselves and others. Instilling a solid work ethic and confidence in their own abilities is key to their success and that is my goal.

"We as teaching professionals literally stand at the gateway of Opportunity."

Teaching is the pulsing heart of who I am. Each day I wake up excited because I get to go to school rather than go to work. Teaching is a responsibility I have chosen and do not take lightly for one minute. If you do the math, over his or her lifetime, a teacher has a direct impact on thousands of kids. In his *Last Lecture*, Randy Pausch, distinguished professor from Carnegie Mellon University who recently lost his life to terminal cancer, delivered a poignant message to teachers. He says the true role of a teacher is to, "enable the dreams of others." This comes with hard work, sweat, and even tears. Each year, I write in the seniors' graduation cards, "Now you have the tools afforded to you by your education, the upbringing of your parents, and God-given talents. Go out and make the world a better place!" We as teaching professionals literally stand at the gateway of Opportunity.

In a time when Sir Richard Branson's *White Knight II* is ready to blast a civilian into outer space (for a price)... when the gene for spider silk can be implanted into a goat's DNA and the silk spun like cotton candy from the milk to build bullet-proof vests stronger than Kevlar, ...a time when we know how to regrow human organs from miraculous but highly controver-

sial stem cells... and a time when computer gurus are developing technology faster than they can be regulated, teachers have an awesome responsibility to not only deliver rigorous content, but to give students the skills to ask reasonable questions.

Teaching millennial learners requires a shift in thinking. They are electronically connected with their never-ending arsenal of devices and are attracted to learning opportunities that have real-world applications. They are optimists and want to be actively engaged by seeing, doing, and discussing. Recently a student responding to a question on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE) was quoted as saying, "I wish school could be intellectually challenging as well as academically challenging." It is one thing to study about the Vietnam War, it is quite another to visit with a veteran. It is one thing to read about the physics of water, but another to investigate these same principles in learning stations in a pool! It is one thing to study about the products of photosynthesis, it is certainly another to step outside to collect and analyze these same byproducts from leaves. The world inside and outside my classroom is a dynamic learning lab waiting to be explored!

Authentic, standards-based learning requires more initial planning time on the part of the teacher, but the rewards are numerous. I give myself a pat on the back when grading a test or an alternative assessment and discover that the students have mastered the material. When I taught students with special needs, similar success was observed. Another bonus of authentic learning is the rich interactions that present themselves in this type of learning. Not only is the teacher able to see the talents of the student such as their abilities with technology, leadership, art forms, mathematics, dance, to name a few, but can establish the personal connections that are many times stifled in a traditional classroom. For example, through informal dialogue (walking to the outdoor lab, helping with an experiment in the classroom) the teacher and student can discuss career options or the teacher can lend an ear to assist with teenage dilemmas. Last year, an anatomy student and I were discussing dissecting experiences one has in medical school. When we finished she said, "This is the first time I have ever had a personal conversation with one of my teachers." Research on at-risk students tells us that many of these kids won't give a teacher the time of day without the teacher having first established a personal relationship with them. The final reward of using

authentic learning is the humor that arises from spontaneous events. As we all know, kids say and do the funniest things when they can be inventive!

My school family at Frankfort High School strives for improvement by wrapping itself around the needs of the students. We strive for continuous improvement of all facets of the school community. At the end of each day, I take a few moments to reflect on my teaching and ask myself this question, "What can I do better tomorrow?" This is the same expectation I have of my students.

"My students are the reason why I am in education."

Teaching is one of the most important professions there is. Being in charge of the educational lives of young people is an overwhelming task, but one that is most rewarding. Teachers not only educate students about their own subject, but about life in general. It is true that a teacher has many roles in the classroom which many times include becoming the parent. It is a natural part of teaching, just as having to do recess duty, sponsoring clubs or coaching a sport. I have my own two children and then every year I have 150 more at school. I love teaching and my students. Of course there have been times when I have been frustrated with the administration, mandates from the state and even all the paper work. I would usually shake my head and start rethinking about why I ever wanted to become a teacher. Then I would walk into my classroom and sitting there was the answer to my question. My students are the reason why I am in education. I decided many years ago that I would not let any of the outside educational drama affect my dedication to the students and what is taking place in my classroom.

It has always been very important to me that my students do well in class. It never mattered how much work it took on my part to accomplish this. What I

decided was that all students can learn, but there were four keys to their success. It depended on how they learned, how much they retained, how fast they could learn and how motivated they were to learn. I have always been a teacher who reinvents my lesson plans each year to make sure my students are learning and are motivated. When I started teaching twenty three years ago, differentiated learning was not a popular educational philosophy. I just wanted to do whatever I could in however many ways it took for my students to learn. I always wondered how teachers could leave the building at 3:30 carrying nothing with them and I left at 4:30 carrying a large bag of work for the evening. For a long time I wondered what I was doing wrong. Then I realized I was just teaching the only way I knew how and wanted to teach. The bottom line was that I wanted to be prepared with a lesson that engaged everyone in numerous ways so that the students would be successful. Teaching is such a rewarding and sometimes challenging career for me. When I tell people that I teach high school Spanish, the usual response is "I feel sorry for you", or "How can you stand those kids?" I respond with, "My kids are great". Of course there are those students that do not have the same philosophy about

their education that I do, and I am frustrated when the students do not put into their lessons the effort that I put into their lessons, but those students do not ruin my enthusiasm. I do have the added advantage though of having the same students for two or three years while in high school. I get to see them grow from goofy ninth graders into mature young adults. I am with them through their disappointments and successes in all aspects of their life. I learn from them as much as they learn from me.

Everyone has different opinions on the characteristics of an outstanding teacher. I do not necessarily feel that I am one. I am simply doing what I have been entrusted to do. The difference is how I accomplish my goals. I am someone who genuinely cares about my students' success and works to find and create multiple techniques to educate and motivate my students. I am someone who creates an exciting and educational learning environment, I strive to be a good role model, and I try to be fair and consistent. I am someone who understands that being a teacher also means hours of extra planning, grading and volunteering for after school committees and extra curricular duties. I understand that the life of a teacher does not end at 3:30, or Friday afternoon or even at the end of the calendar year.

Jennifer Bowman
Huntington County Community School Corporation
Horace Mann Elementary School
Grade 5

*“I am a teacher on paper,
but more importantly I am a teacher in my heart.”*

A teacher is who I always wanted to be. It is who I worked so hard to be. It is who I hope to always be. It is who I am. I am a teacher on paper, but more importantly I am a teacher in my heart. I vividly remember walking into the school on my first day as a real life teacher. I was so excited, so nervous, and so hopeful. I also remember walking out of the school late in the evening on that same day. I was so excited, so nervous, so hopeful, so exhausted, and so overwhelmed. It finally had hit me, “I am a teacher”. The immense reality and responsibility of “teacher” was now on my shoulders. The best part is, I still feel all of those same emotions today. It is my solemn prayer that I carry these emotions throughout the rest of my career. This leads me to commitment and humanity. These life skills are key to my philosophy of teaching.

Let me start by clarifying what I mean by commitment. I am not committed to my career, I am committed to students. Educating every one of my students to the best of my ability and to empower them to reach their potential is what I strive to achieve.

My commitment to my students is shown through providing them a safe, secure, and caring environment in

which I can use current research based best practices to effectively provide opportunities for them to gain the necessary tools in life to reach their potential. At the same time, I use what experience has taught me. This means adjusting my teaching to the needs of my current group of students. I have yet to have groups of students with the same needs from year to year.

It sounds so cliché, but it is so true, the whole school community must do what is best for children. As a teacher, I have a captive audience of several children each day to which I must model and deliver my best. The power in that is immense! If I am entrusted daily with this power, I had better be committed to delivering. My commitment is demonstrated in high expectations of myself, my coworkers, my students, and my students’ parents. If I want my students to be successful, I have to strive for success and model it. My students do look up to me. They talk about me. They model me. It is my responsibility to show them something worth imitating. This really hit home for me when one of my new foster children was at school with me one evening. She was playing school and “talking” to her class. The negative teacher tone that she took with her imaginary students made such a

strong and immediate impact on me. I vowed right then and there that I would never inflict any type of negativity on my students. So, I am committed to being the best educator that I can be. When I make mistakes, I try to take ownership, model that is okay to make mistakes. Then I model how I learn from them. I'll even go so far as to say my mistakes have made me a better teacher today. They reinforce my commitment to being the best I can be.

Humanity is something that has really struck a chord with me recently. A few years ago, I pursued and became a foster parent. I thought, "I am a teacher. I can handle kids. I am sure I can teach fostering a thing or two." Well, I had my eyes opened. Fostering has taught me many things about teaching. It taught me the value of every human life, respect for other lifestyles, appreciation for God's blessings, compassion for those who see no choices, the effects of the damage we can inflict on each other, and endless more. As a result, I have changed as a teacher. I have learned to approach my students as individuals, not a class. I have learned to really look at them and get to know what motivates, challenges, and reassures them. I have learned to teach the child, not just teach the subject matter. In this way I empower them to reach their potential despite obstacles put in their way.

As a teacher, I must utilize LIFESKILLS to the best of my ability. This enables my students to use LIFESKILLS. This is humanity. This is being a teacher. My students deserve it and have a right to it.

Janie Boyden
Elkhart Community Schools
Elkhart Memorial High School
Grades 9-12 Physical Education and Dance

*“I expect the best from my students,
and strive to make my instruction positive and engaging.”*

Students will rise to meet a teacher's expectations. Teaching starts with the right attitude. I expect the best from my students, and strive to make my instruction positive and engaging. Even though I treat students with respect regardless of their background or reputation, I do understand that a positive attitude alone will not guarantee success and longevity as a teacher.

In order to achieve success in the classroom, I have defined the curricular goals I want students to achieve. One has to ask *“What do I want my students to know and be capable of doing when they leave my class?”* Sound curriculum is an important foundation in developing the content to achieve these goals. It should be authentic, standards based, and differentiated so that it allows optimum learning opportunities for students.

These beliefs are reflected in my teaching style. In physical education class, many walls can be built and assumptions made regarding what type of learning environment the teacher will allow. “Will it be demeaning?” or “Will I be embarrassed?” are questions that students may contemplate regarding physical education class. Discipline, organization, fairness

and consistency are qualities necessary to control behavior and keep students engaged. It is imperative that students are provided a safe and comfortable classroom. Teachers are the gatekeepers who should not allow negativity and confusion to enter the classroom if at all possible. I try to provide a positive environment so that students have the best experience in physical education class possible.

My philosophy has always been to enhance all areas of development in order to produce a well-rounded student with the tools they need for success. Although physical education emphasizes the bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, other intelligences such as interpersonal and logical-mathematical intelligences also have their place. Students can learn interpersonal skills through games and problem-solving activities that promote teamwork and leadership as well as empathy and concern for others. Students that have strengths in logical mathematics can understand and make a connection to fitness concepts using the body mass index and target heart rate formulas. Students have also been able to express themselves in written form through writing prompts focused on fitness concepts. My class is not your *mother's gym class*; it truly provides an

education of the physical body and the mind.

I believe what makes me an outstanding teacher is the relationship I build with students. Students trust me and know that I always have their best interest in mind. I found over the years that students need and want discipline and boundaries. The structure a school provides is the best chance to positively influence kids before they leave us to enter the “real world”. Knowing I contributed to a student’s ultimate success is very rewarding.

As I enter my twenty-third year of teaching, I will continue to become a better teacher. The world is changing and students, though the same in many ways, bring so many different needs and experiences to the school environment. I want to stay prepared for each student that enters my classroom. Teachers must collaborate with other professionals, research to refine their subject knowledge and continually self-reflect. Reflecting enhances a teachers’ ability to remain open to new ideas and evaluate approaches that strengthen the quality of education for every student.

Stephanie Bradway
Nettle Creek School Corporation
Hagerstown Elementary
Kindergarten

*"I feel young children learn by doing, and
by being active participants in this learning."*

I feel young children learn by doing, and by being active participants in this learning. The learning experience in Kindergarten affects how well young children will do in their future education. As a Kindergarten teacher, I have a direct impact on this learning experience. My job, therefore, is very important and holds a lot of responsibility.

Because I feel young children are active learners, if you walked into my classroom on any given day, you would not find my students sitting at desks working on their own in silence. We work in small groups, whole group, with partners, and independently, but my students are encouraged to think and share out loud. There's movement from one task to another within my classroom, and manipulatives are provided. When writing or reading as a class, my students will be active participants as well. They are encouraged to add to the story or share their thoughts.

I feel communication between the parents and the teacher will also contribute to the child's learning experience. I begin every year by mailing out a welcome letter to both the child and the parent. I have found that Kindergarten parents are as apprehensive about the school experi-

ence as the children. My letter details what to expect at the beginning of the year, as well as offers a personal introduction of myself, so they're more confident and comfortable in turning their child over to me on that first day. This communication continues throughout the year with weekly newsletters and behavior reports, and a classroom website that I update daily. Communication between the teacher and students is equally important. I want my students to feel they can always talk to me and ask questions without the fear of being judged. My classroom should be as comfortable to them as their own home, because they spend a majority of their day with me.

Along with establishing active learning and communication in my classroom, I also want the children to feel learning is fun. I try to get to know my students quickly, so I can provide activities that interest them, while expanding their knowledge.

Finally I believe children are unique, not only in their personalities, but in their learning styles as well. It is my job each year to get to know each and every child, and how they learn best. Then I have to make sure that with each skill I teach, I present it in ways

so each child feels successful. Because children are unique individuals, we celebrate their accomplishments—big or small—together. Each goal they achieve should be celebrated.

As I stated in the beginning, I believe Kindergarten is the foundation of a child's educational future. I can put them on the right path by providing open communication between the parent and myself, as well as the student and me; by making sure my classroom is an enjoyable place where children are busy learning; and by providing a diversity of activities to teach skills so that every child knows the feeling of success.

Jackie Breitenbach
Northeastern Wayne School Corporation
Northeastern Elementary School
Grades K-6 Physical Education

*"If I can get my students to smile and be proud of themselves everyday,
I have accomplished my goal."*

I read the paragraph describing this section with mixed emotions. I am very passionate about my philosophy of education as anyone who has ever asked me about it can attest. Once I begin with a captive audience, my voice takes on a personality of its own. I am extremely animated and occasionally the veins have been known to stick out on my neck.

The part of the paragraph that tells me to include my own ideas of what makes me an outstanding teacher I find intimidating. I was very humbled to be chosen Teacher of the Year for Northeastern School Corporation by a vote of my peers and let me tell you, my peers are amazing teachers. They are all dedicated, accomplished teachers and are all "Teachers of the Year" to me. To be named Teacher of the Year by them is the highest honor I could ever obtain. Don't get me wrong, I am very happy that such knowledgeable people are reading this portfolio, but you will never truly know my teaching ability from this. My co-workers know what I do as I see all of them every day and work with their students each week.

I guess one of the most important aspects of my teaching is the fact that for me, as well as for most teachers I am sure, my students are my children.

I always have to qualify the question when asked, "How are your kids?" with my own question of, "My students or my biological children?" As a classroom teacher, I had approximately 25 students each year. As the physical education instructor, I have 550 students in grades K-6. It doesn't get any better than this.

As far as my personal teaching style, I stress humor and personal best when I am teaching, coaching, renovating, or anything else I do. If I am a good model and show how much I enjoy what I am doing, it is bound to rub off. My students and the faculty know that laughter and humor are an important part of my life. This shows enjoyment and joy with living. If I can get my students to smile and be proud of themselves everyday, I have accomplished my goal.

The best quote I have ever heard is one by James Baldwin and is the mission statement for Galileo Charter School. Mr. Baldwin says, "For these are all our children and we will either benefit them or pay the consequences for whom they become." This should be the mantra for every teacher, everyday. This is the goal.

*“... if I can change it for one individual,
I can change it for two. And if for two, how about three?”*

My belief about my role as a teacher is best told through a simple story.

The Starfish Story by: Loren Eiseley

One day a man was walking along the beach when he noticed a boy picking something up and gently throwing it into the ocean.

Approaching the boy, he asked, “What are you doing?”

The youth replied, “Throwing starfish back into the ocean. The surf is up and the tide is going out. If I don’t throw them back, they’ll die.”

“Son,” the man said, “don’t you realize there are miles and miles of beach and hundreds of starfish? You can’t make a difference!”

After listening politely, the boy bent down, picked up another starfish, and threw it back into the surf. Then, smiling at the man, he said... “I made a difference for that one.”

I have taught long enough to know that I cannot change the entire world. But, I can change the world for an individual. And if I can change it for one individual, I can change it for two. And if for two, how about three? And since I focus on individuals rather than groups, I must know my students

inside and out. I must know their individual strengths, weaknesses, dreams and aspirations, fears, goals, and every other detail deemed important to the success of this individual. And because I have a whole room full of individuals, I must multiply this knowledge deep and wide.

Quite simply put, each of my students needs something different from me. We share a common set of goals that we need to meet by the end of the year, but we are all at different starting places. When I have a friend call me and ask directions to my house, my first question is always the same. Where are you? Because the directions will be different depending on that starting place. It is like that with my students. My first question that I always ask is, “Where are you?”

I teach Language Arts, but there are a million ways to teach Language Arts. My task and challenge is to find a way to teach this subject in a way that addresses individual needs and levels while maintaining a level of engagement for these learners. When you compound this task with the fact that I work with middle-school students (a unique group with their own set of needs and challenges), the task becomes all the more complex.

I do my very best to incorporate a middle school student's needs and challenges into my daily classroom strategies. A middle school student is social by nature. They can expect to be in a small group activity sometime during the Language Arts period where talking is encouraged and required. Middle-schoolers want independence and choice. They can expect to choose from a list of projects and assignments that address the same learning outcome. A middle-level student wants to know "When will we ever use this in real life?" I design lessons around real life activities to show them relevance.

Last year I wanted to inspire my students to become writers. I thought about their natural love of music, and put together a daylong writers' workshop called, "Westfield's Top Songwriter." I brought in a professional songwriter from Nashville, Tennessee, and together we taught the art of songwriting through the six traits of writing. Students learned the importance of syllable count, rhyme, word-choice, theme, and audience (among many other objectives). They worked in small groups, actually writing the lyrics to a song. When they were finished, if their project was done correctly, the songwriter was able to use his guitar and put the lyrics to

music before their very eyes. The songwriter then took the lyrics with him back to Nashville, scored the songs using the six traits of writing rubric, and then chose the two best. The two best songs were recorded in a Nashville studio and sent back to the students on a CD. This project incorporated a middle level students love of competition to ensure top, quality writing. It answered the question, "When am I ever going to use syllables in real life?" The best part of this project was that one of the groups that won the contest was not a group of students who loved school. This project, however, inspired this group of students to take their writing seriously. I am convinced that they will be life-long writers.

If my students could remember me in any way; I would hope that they would always know that they mattered to me.

"It is the great teacher who captures his or her students' attention and ignites a fire under them for learning."

Plato once said, "Do not train children to learning by force and harshness, but direct them to it by what amuses their minds, so that you may be better able to discover with accuracy the peculiar bent of the genius of each." I believe that it is our job as educators to find out what our students find amusing and using that to lead them to greater understanding of what it is we desire them to learn. In this world of endless entertainment options for our students, I feel that we need to evolve the education field more towards the entertainment field. There are days that I feel that I am more of a stand-up comedian than a music teacher, but it is on those days that I feel I really connected with my students. It is those days that I can see and hear the progress occurring in the whole class. It is the great teacher who captures his or her students' attention and ignites a fire under them for learning. As my high school chemistry teacher did all those years ago, the great teacher must use entertainment to get the desired results. There are other teachers who scoff at the thought that we might have to go to extraordinary measures to capture our students' attention. I do not. I simply see it as a part of our current culture. In many ways we demand to be entertained more than in the past. Why should we hold our

students to any different standard than we would hold to ourselves?

I try to embrace this aspect of entertainment in my teaching. I will do just about anything to get a laugh out of my students. When they are doing well, I will break out into a spontaneous interpretive dance to go along with the music they are playing. My goal is to make each class memorable to them. An anonymous quote that sums this up is, "They may forget what you said but they will never forget how you made them feel." If I can get them to feel good about what they are doing, they will want to do it more, and in doing so will learn. I try to use humor to link the good feeling to what they are doing. Sometimes it takes dressing up in a full Buzz Lightyear outfit for superhero day. I can guarantee that the vast majority of my students will remember fondly the day that Buzz directed them in band class. If this leads them to want to play music more, then it is all worth it. "If people did not do silly things, nothing intelligent would ever get done." —Ludwig Wittgenstein

I feel like the luckiest person in the world when I am in front of my classroom. Many people go to work and do very mundane tasks. I get to go to "work" and make music with young

people every day. What better thing is there? One particular joy that I have is seeing my students grow from sixth grade through eighth grade. When they come to me in sixth grade, they usually have no idea how to hold the instrument they chose to study much less play it. By the time they leave me for high school, they have a firm grasp of the instrument. What a growth for three years! Where other teachers see the students for only one year, or sometimes for only one semester, I get to see them for three years. It is easier to teach the better you know your pupil. I find this very evident in my classroom.

When it comes down to it, if I am having fun, then my students are. I try to let my joy of teaching be evident to anyone who enters my classroom. I want each of my students to see that I am having a blast in front of them, making music. My hope is that the joy is contagious, that my students will start exhibiting their own joy for making music. If they have joy in making music, that music will become a big part of their future lives. Truly, that is what I want for them, not to become virtuoso performers, but to love music.

*“Challenge and inspire them to do things
they don’t know they can accomplish.”*

Hello Mr. Wall, I sure wish the Clarinets and Trumpets would get that F sharp. I have been known to turn around and talk to the wall. Students listen more attentively to something this absurd, and that keeps them continually engaged in learning.

If you weren’t important, you wouldn’t be here. Every student has potential, and individualized instruction is foundational to helping students reach their potential.

What you meant to say is, “When do we have to leave this class?” If students ask, “When do we get out of this class?” I won’t answer. Attitude is critical. Staying positive helps students receive satisfaction in the process of accomplishing goals.

We may mess up, but we never give up. Students must learn in an environment where they’re allowed to risk. Fear of failure is a self-fulfilling prophecy. Challenge and inspire them to do things they don’t know they can accomplish. Instill discipline so they will achieve great things.

You are a very good band. There is a place for constructive criticism, but don’t hold back positive reinforcement that is rightfully theirs. The best

teaching is needed at the youngest age where learning habits are first formed. If you can’t help a student, then find someone who can.

Yes you can, and yes you did! The highest moments of teaching occur when students achieve and realize it. Positive accomplishments solidify self esteem in young people. Trophies, plaques and other honors reflect student growth and achievement in campaigns undertaken together. Enriched and inspired students are the teacher’s true reward.

These are just black dots on a white piece of paper. It’s not music until you do something with it. Music must have emotional impact and touch the heart. I tell students, “I can get a computer to play cleaner, but I can’t get a computer to express emotions.” Music, well done, celebrates our humanity and lifts us to our most noble ideals.

You have to watch the retard [ritardando]. The students may think this is a silly statement, but it helps draw their attention to ensemble interaction. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and only the whole can fully express the composer’s intent. These lessons carry over into

the rest of life as we contribute to the human race.

He likes it, we're playing it. I say this when we play student requests on Fridays. Students quickly realize songs that they don't like, others love. We must develop respect and admiration for other people, cultures and their music.

Ignorance is bliss, and I'm usually a pretty happy person. Selective ignorance can be a good thing. If negative information does not help me as a teacher, I would rather not know. Don't grinch in the teacher's lounge about problem children if no positive solutions are offered. Start with no prejudgments of students.

In addition, some tasks are so large that it is best to forget for the moment all that needs to be done. Selective ignorance lets me focus solely on today's step so I'm not daunted by the immensity of the task. Don't let fear paralyze you or the students.

You need to teach you. Encourage student self-reliance and act as a coach when possible. Hold students accountable for learning and applying what has been presented. The best teaching teaches students to teach themselves.

It is difficult to know you have arrived if you don't know where you are going. Have a clearly organized vision. Be ready for the unexpected and capitalize on serendipities. Account for student mindset and environments, but keep moving forward toward a clear goal.

Jana Conn
Carroll Consolidated School Corporation
Carroll Elementary School
Grade 6 Mathematics, Reading, and Spelling

*“My hope is that every student views education
as a necessity in everyday living.”*

Learning is a lifelong process. Learning doesn't just take place when you are between the walls of an educational institution. Adults are constantly learning. Education does not stop after a degree. The application of learning is a whole new process. I am continually seeking new ways to help my students see that what they are doing in school now is merely a training for the rest of their lives. The discipline, organization, time management, and other skills can be used in any career.

I stress the importance of math and other skills required to be successful in the classroom that can be adapted and used in everyday living and in any career. Sometimes math concepts are impossible to connect with everyday living. However, they are needed as building blocks to more complex math. This is what I hope students grasp.

As a project, we build roller coasters out of craft sticks, hot glue, and other various materials. A golf ball needs to be able to maneuver through the course of the roller coaster. Additional points are given for creativity and theme, turns and inversions. Students, working in groups of four, have to keep a journal of calculations, drawings, lists of ideas and trials. We have people

from the community come in and judge the roller coasters. The top six roller coasters will be taken to Indiana Beach Academic Days for a roller coaster contest against other schools. This project allows students to use many skills from math and science. Persistence and endurance are two of the several life skills that the students use with this project. The communication between the students is a great assessment tool. You hear the students communicating the concepts and ideas rather than just writing down answers on a piece of paper. It is interesting to see students who struggle to complete thirty math problems on a homework assignment, applying the skills to make a successful and creative roller coaster.

I believe the basics have to be taught. Without knowledge of multiplication facts, sixth grade math is very difficult. It is impossible to grow without having a strong and large foundation of basic knowledge. I feel that allowing students to apply the skills with activities gives the students meaning and motivation to continue with their education.

We had a school wide Polar Express Day the last day before Christmas break. I organized the day based upon

a similar day at a previous school I had worked. We spent the day doing all kinds of activities based upon the book, *Polar Express*, written by Chris Van Allsburg. The students worked on writing and illustrating stories and building trains with different grade levels. The older students became mentors and teachers. The younger students loved the one-on-one attention they received from the older students. The students also completed activities within their own grade levels. The culminating activity was an oral reading of the story by the principal, a visit from Santa to hand out the “first gift of Christmas” to a lucky student, and a bell for every student to take home. The sixth graders had assisted in tying strings onto the 690 bells purchased by the PTO. All students in grades K-6 had a day full of learning and sharing.

My hope is that every student views education as a necessity in everyday living. Sometimes learning is fun, sometimes it is something not so fun, but needed. Learning never stops, although it sometimes changes direction. Embracing learning can be rewarding and fun. Recovering from failures and mistakes is truly learning. Students should not be afraid to fail, but should be afraid not to correct failures and mistakes.

*“... what makes any of us an outstanding teacher
is our willingness to keep learning together.”*

Sometimes, near the end of a course, I ask students to demonstrate their understanding of something I taught earlier in the year. Despite my sincere belief that I taught a particular concept as well as I could, sometimes they stare at me blindly in response. At those times I wonder if I have ever really taught anybody anything and doubt whether I am even a competent teacher, let alone an outstanding one. At those times I seek out a sympathetic colleague and ask for input. I remind myself that teaching is a big job, and none of us should attempt it alone.

The sympathetic colleague in my first school was my mentor teacher, Mrs. Murrell, who taught me how to juggle the unbelievable (to me) workload associated with first year teaching by reminding me to breathe. Her projection of *calm*, in her classroom, in the halls, in the teacher’s lounge (whenever I ran to her always needing something urgently), demonstrated a classroom management tool which has never failed me. My relationship with her was the first in a long line of collaborative relationships that have informed my teaching life.

The next time I found myself in desperate need of input was when I was given the responsibility of overseeing a 50-

computer writing center. It seems a poor management choice to me now; I knew something about writing but almost nothing about computers. Students came to me with as many questions about computing—“Where’s my print job?” “Why is my computer locked up?” “What does this *mean*?”—as they did about drafting, and I was frustrated to find myself unable to help them. A business teacher helped me find Scott, a high school sophomore, who agreed to become my student intern. Instead, he became my next mentor. At his suggestion I began carrying a pocket-sized spiral notebook wherever I went, recording the steps he taught me to take in order to solve problems as they arose. From Scott I learned to view my students as true collaborative partners, as active members of the learning community rather than as passive recipients of information.

Several years later, when I left middle-school teaching to move to high-school teaching, I replaced a heterogeneous sixth-grade classroom with an AP twelfth-grade classroom. On the first day of school in my new building, I faced my first group of seniors with the certainty that everything I had to offer them was probably an insult to their natural abilities. But that year I had

the great good fortune to work with Mr. Wachtel, our corporation's writing specialist. Together, we talked about how reading and writing with my gifted students should look. He visited my classroom and together we modeled peer conferencing and the messy process of drafting and revising and redrafting for my students. From him I developed a willingness to open up my teaching for public view and to welcome additional opportunities for co-teaching.

Over the years, I have also learned a great deal from teachers whom I have been assigned to mentor. They help me to seek what yoga instructors call "beginner's mind," that sense of newness in every teaching situation. From their example, I am reminded to look for the joy of encountering new ideas and fresh perspectives even in teaching situations that might have become less than new through repetition.

In *The Courage to Teach*, Parker J. Palmer says, "Learning—learning together—is the thing for all of us." Whatever I am as a teacher (and I suspect whatever most of us are) is the result of the genuine curiosity of my students and of a great deal of generous support from other teachers. In every one of my teaching years, in every building, there have always been others who knew things I also needed to know and who have been willing to

share. Now, at the beginning, middle, or end of any course, when I ask students to demonstrate their understanding of something I have taught, and they respond correctly and with interest, I understand that those collaborative relationships have everything to do with the kind of teacher I am. This knowledge keeps me firmly connected to my profession, my fellow teachers, and the idea that what makes any of us an outstanding teacher is our willingness to keep learning together.

*"It is rewarding to feel the excitement
and have students eager to start their explorations."*

In his book, What Great Teachers Do Differently, Todd Whitaker states that, "Great teachers have high expectations for their students and even higher expectations for themselves." Each day one hundred twenty-five parents trust me to do my very best to help their child learn something new. What a humbling responsibility!

I believe that science is a discovery process and my challenge is to provide students with opportunities, tools and motivation to risk exploring new things. Students come to the science classroom with many fears. They tell me only smart kids are good at science. Some have already given up on the subject. It takes courage for children to try something new in order to make a discovery. The first week, I show students that one does not have to be a geek or an Einstein to be good in science. Over time they see that consistent, quality effort is all that is needed for success... not innate ability or being a nerd.

To encourage my students and provide them with tools for learning, I start the class as a one-woman show playing four roles: Salesperson, Scientist, Merchant and Parent. After setting the tone for the day, I step off of my

classroom stage and turn the production and learning over to my students. Each role sets the stage for helping my students to explore and discover science.

As a former marketing director, I see myself as "selling" science each day. If my students believe what we are studying is the most amazing thing they learn all day, then they will work harder. From spooling DNA and testing chemical theories to figuring out tectonic plate movements, I keep telling and showing my students that I love science and hope they do, too.

I find science exciting because it is always changing and allows me to ask questions and find answers. In the field of education this is called inquiry-based learning. The National Science Education Standards state that, "Inquiry parallels the process used by scientists to solve problems." As a scientist, I use the 5 E Model (Engage, Explore, Explain, Extend, Evaluate) to foster curiosity so that students make observations and ask questions (Engage), design experiments and interpret their findings (Explore), communicate results (Explain) and consider real-world applications (Extend and Evaluate).

My role as merchant helps me to reach more children in the classroom because I offer them many ways to “buy” into learning. While science is very hands-on, some students need to write about their experiences, graph their findings or draw what they see happening. Others need to present their findings through skits. One year there were several students I could not seem to reach so I even tried a study with baby rats. In an ideal day, there is a lot going on in my classroom because each group of students is working on different projects they have designed. It is rewarding to feel the excitement and have students eager to start their explorations.

Mother Theresa said, “Do not think that love, in order to be genuine has to be extraordinary. What we need is to love without getting tired.” Just as in parenting, in teaching we must love, coach and encourage without getting tired. Teaching and learning are marathons. Students need time to learn and gain confidence. In order to help students overcome their fears of science, I must always remind them that, like a parent, I believe in them and will not give up on them even if they give up on themselves.

The rewards of teaching come from the students themselves. In middle school these are subtle: proud smiles that are

quickly swallowed when a student has done well, fleeting sparkles of the eyes when a discovery is made, hugs when former students return with A’s in high school science, and parents seeking me out in the grocery store to tell me that their child will be studying science or engineering in college. These rewards motivate me to keep my expectations for myself high while encouraging my students to discover science.

Lawrence DeMoss
Richland-Bean Blossom Community School Corporation
Edgewood High School
Grades 9-12 English

*“A teacher’s responsibility lies in maintaining an environment
for all students to flourish.”*

In 1906, my favorite American author, Mark Twain, said in a speech introducing his friend, Dr. Henry Van Dyke, “To be good is noble, but to teach others how to be good is nobler—and less trouble.” I am not so vain as to believe I have the secret to teaching high school students, but I do believe I can share a sense of wonder and curiosity about the world we inhabit. Sometimes—more often than I deserve—when I have a really gifted student and I get really lucky, something happens in my classroom that makes a student want to go somewhere, be someone, do something that will benefit that world.

A teacher’s responsibility lies in maintaining an environment for all students to flourish. I don’t know how to do that all the time, so I try to make sure I “make the rounds.” My students bring a fascinating collection of experiences, personalities, beliefs, and talents to my classroom. Some of them have perfected the art of earning good grades without learning. Some work at the limits of their abilities and fail most of the tests they take. Most would rather be somewhere other than English class. By using humor, enthusiasm, great literature, and a variety of teaching strategies, I try to engage all

my students as much as I can. At the same time, the majority of my students intend to pursue a four-year degree, and I want them to understand the skills and effort that such a pursuit will demand. Most students don’t like lectures, and most don’t learn best by listening to lectures, but to succeed in college they must be able to take notes and evaluate information delivered in lectures. Fewer students than ever spend much time reading, but their reading skills will determine whether they will succeed in college. Information has become readily available and, consequently, has lost its value. Students have to learn to critically examine information and separate that which is useful from that which is trivial. I talk to my students about these issues and demonstrate in a variety of ways what they need to learn.

Ultimately, education is not vocational training; education is life. Too many students have swallowed the culture’s definition of success as attaining wealth, and that wealth is the goal of a good education. Such a narrow view is both empty and self-defeating.

My dream is for every one of my students to find that for which they

feel passion and devote themselves to it. If they do, they will achieve fulfillment, and in the end, that is the proper goal of a good education.

“The returns of education are proportional to what teachers put in.”

Teaching can be one of the most difficult professions that a person could choose, but definitely has the potential to be the most rewarding. The returns of education are proportional to what teachers put in. Hard work is greatly rewarded. I believe that three words constitute a great educational system: Intention, Focus, Discipline.

Great intention must go into everything that a teacher does. There must be a reason behind every action. It is imperative to not only know the current situation, but also the point to be attained. Many forms of data could and should be utilized to determine these starting points, as well as the causes. Realistic goals must be set, and research-based action steps put in place to achieve them.

There is to be a focused approach to each aspect of a teacher's preparation. Specific content, skills, processes, etc. must be identified for each lesson and activity. In addition, it is vital that each individual is taken into account, and that measures are being taken to meet each of their needs. Making personal connections with those you are involved with is important if you are to have this focus.

At the essence of an effective educational situation is the personal discipline that each member of that situation puts forward. Sometimes, it becomes less restrictive to stray from the target than to continue to destroy roadblocks that may appear. We must continue to remind ourselves of the outcomes that will result of such a disciplined approach.

The integration of these three concepts is not fully recognized unless it is also instilled in those receiving instruction. It is essential that an intentional, focused, and disciplined approach is in place on a daily basis for all involved. By maintaining our focus on each individual student, motivation and engagement will follow, leading to a positive and effective educational experience.

Ann Easter
Logansport Community School Corporation
Columbia Middle School
Grade 7 Alternative Education

*“As an educator I must nourish and develop
my students’ emotional and academic needs.”*

Exhilarated, awestruck, heart pounding, scared, nervous, relieved, and proud! These are just a few adjectives that describe not only my emotions on the first day of school each fall but also how I was feeling after I completed my first dog sled trip! Making a connection between teaching and dog sledding has unleashed a new passion in me and created the perfect analogy for my philosophy of teaching. Exemplary teachers learn to identify their students’ needs and create a classroom full of differentiated instruction that excites and encourages growth. I believe in creating lessons that are visually stimulating, hands-on, and also promote the character counts traits which will build strong citizens in our community.

Teachers and mushers are similar in that they lead by example and only with voice commands. Students, as well as dogs on a team, will not perform well if they do not respect and trust the person who is in charge. As an educator I must nourish and develop my students’ emotional and academic needs. They quickly learn that I am supportive of them and that I care a great deal about what they think and what their needs are. Great teachers master the *art* of teaching, but exemplary teachers capture the

heart of teaching. I have been told that I have the heart of a teacher. I consider this the ultimate compliment. The heart of an exemplary teacher in my mind is one who truly possesses the passion for our educating our youth.

As the lead musher in my classroom it is my duty to be prepared to lead, but also content to follow where my students take me on their educational journey. Students are selected to be in the Achieve class in the spring and they, along with their parents, meet with me and our principal. At this meeting we set individual goals that we will work on the following year. All of my students are at-risk of failing and two of the skills I work on with them is improving their self-confidence and instilling a belief of success into their work ethic. As the school year progresses, I am able to build a strong personal relationship with them and guide them on a path of success. Once the students become more confident in their abilities, they are able to contribute more to our team effort and ultimate goal of becoming lifelong learners.

John Ruskin once said, “The highest reward for man’s toil is not what he gets for it, but what he becomes by it.” I am rewarded every day I am around

students. I am a different person today because of the impact my students and others in the education profession have left on me. I have the privilege to work with the best staff and group of kids in Logansport. Rewards come in the form of smiles, high fives, and verbal compliments, those light bulb looks on their faces when they have grasped a new concept, and by the many notes and pictures that adorn my desk throughout the year. Rewards that come from my students tug at my heart and drive the passion in me to become a better educator for the next group of students I will meet.

Allison Edwards
Union Township School Corporation
Union Center Elementary School
Kindergarten

*“When students know you are excited and fired up about something
they have fun and in turn learn more!”*

I love the art of teaching. I am excited to see the growth that students make from the beginning of the year to the end. I feel that a teacher's most important job is to put the needs of the students first. In order for students to grow, I provide a positive learning environment, use a variety of resources, and I am organized, flexible and energetic.

Another important job as an educator is to provide a safe and secure learning environment for all students. I do this by creating a warm and cozy classroom so my students feel at home in my class. I have rugs, lamps, curtains and bean bags to give the students an at home feeling. To be effective with all my students I provide differentiated instruction by providing a variety of lessons to meet all my students' needs. I form an atmosphere of respect with my students so they can feel secure in my class. I create this environment by encouraging students to try their best, giving positive reinforcement and meeting their individual needs.

Another important part of a teacher's role is to use numerous resources to add to the learning environment. Computers play a big role in my teaching. I use computers for my lesson plans, searching the internet for

creative ideas, and assessments. I also use PowerPoint presentations to create interactive lessons for my students. My students use computers to reinforce skills I have already taught, like reading comprehension (Reading Counts Program) and building words on Microsoft Word. There are many great websites and computer programs to reinforce and build on what I teach in the classroom. I think this is a way to add fun to the educational process. The Reading Counts Program is another great resource that plays an important role in my classroom. At the beginning of the school year this challenges students who are reading when they enter kindergarten, or who pick up reading quickly as the year progresses. Towards the end of the year it is my goal to have all students using this program to help their reading performance and understanding of what they are reading. Students love using these valuable resources.

It is also important for me as a teacher to be committed to being the best educator that I can be. I try and accomplish that by being well organized, flexible and energetic. I believe I have all of these characteristics. My classroom is well organized so that students can stay focused. I am flexible in my class when a lesson does not go

exactly as planned, I am able to adjust and move on smoothly. The most important characteristic, in my opinion, is to be positive and energetic while teaching. I look forward to going to “work” everyday. I love what I do and enjoy my “job.” When students know you are excited and fired up about something they have fun and in turn learn more!

Teaching is one of the professions that provide rewards on a daily basis. It may be something as simple as a big smile or hug from a student first thing in the morning or something bigger like a student finally reading that word you have been working on all week. These moments constantly remind me why I am an educator. My students’ growth academically and socially is a huge reward for me as an educator. Parent and student thank you notes and pictures are a huge reward too. I know I am well loved by my students. Parents appreciating my effort are humbling and touching and worth more than any paycheck I will ever receive.

"My goal is to guide each individual so they grow and learn as a complete person."

Considering my philosophy to teach the whole child, I believe it is important to be a positive role model for my students. Early in the year, I establish an atmosphere of consistency and firmness, yet show compassion towards all the students. They learn that I expect the best from them in everything they do. I speak to them with respect and honesty, traits I would like to instill in them. I read in their presence and let them know about my favorite stories. I play the games they like to play at recess. I invite them to lunch with me in the classroom. It provides us with a time to be personal and visit about families, hobbies, and favorites in their lives. I hope to be a role model that is a positive influence in their school and family lives.

All I need to do is look around the classroom and absorb the excitement of children learning and discovering new ideas to be reminded of why I love teaching. The children are by far the most rewarding aspect of the teaching profession. I smile when I watch a child clapping or jumping for joy because he/she finally understands what we have been discussing and says to me, "Oh, this is so easy." Or those students who no matter how hectic the end of the day might be would never fail to seek me out and with the warm-

est, most loving smile, and say, "Good bye, Mrs. Elliott. I'll see you tomorrow." It is those simple words, filled with meaning and love, that make each day of teaching a treasure. The rewards of teaching are personally enormous.

Teaching allows me the opportunity to be the role model and instructor children need. It is my philosophy that children are individuals with a desire to learn. My goal is to guide each individual so they grow and learn as a complete person.

In order to meet the needs of the whole child, I begin with my classroom environment. I create an environment that is a comfortable, cozy room to enter and make their own. A classroom where students know they are safe to be themselves, express their feelings, and open their minds for learning. The rules I establish are simple. They consist of respect others, respect yourself, be responsible for your actions, and always do your personal best. Daily, I welcome each student at the door with a smile, hug or high five, and positive greeting. I encourage them to have confidence to speak out, ask questions, take risks, and let them know they will be respected for their thoughts and questions. This is the

environment by which my children begin each day.

As their instructor, I strive to learn the educational needs of each individual student, so I may effectively teach the skills that match our state standards in a way that students at all levels will learn. This is done using differentiated instruction, small group activities, partner projects, independent assignments and study time with me. It is a goal of mine that in educating the whole child students will develop the skills to become independent thinkers. It is magical to listen to the discussions of these students as they are learning and begin their independent thinking. It goes back to my original thought that with a little motivation children love to learn.

Tammy Farlow
MSD of Wabash County
Southwood Jr./Sr. High School
Grade 8 Math, Grades 7, 9-12 French and Spanish

“... I look for ways in which to bring lessons alive to students.”

My philosophy is to inspire my students to be life-long, productive learners. While my mission is to teach each subject area (French, mathematics, and Spanish) and its curriculum for its usefulness, I believe the content area is the exercise by which students expand their capabilities in preparation for future success in any environment.

Every day I give students the responsibility of learning while I facilitate positive interactions among them, thus enabling each student to develop academically and socially. My efforts in the classroom are a balance of information and inspiration. Therefore, I regard my role as an educator as one who creates an enthusiasm for learning.

Recently as I graded papers at an all-day Little League Baseball tournament, one of my son's coaches passed by, noticed the math assignment, and wondered aloud if anyone taught alternative number systems. As I responded that my eighth grade math curriculum included the binary system and an introduction to other systems, I asked about his interest to which he replied that he uses the hexadecimal system everyday at his workplace in the automotive industry. How excited I was to return to school on Monday and

relate to my eighth grade math classes that a previous lesson of theirs had not only been the focus of a social discussion of mine but that a community member's career is based on its understanding. Presenting curriculum as useful energizes both me and my students, and I look for ways in which to bring lessons alive to students.

It is also my belief that students' experiences in the classroom should reflect the setting and simulate conditions in the business world and future workplaces. In this way my expectations for success and productivity are high and at the same time balanced with activities that foster creativity and cooperation among students. As my students are still in their formative stages of decision making regarding their futures, so must my approaches to instruction remain flexible to meet the needs that each student brings to the classroom.

Holding high standards and setting reasonable expectations is a tenet of teaching. This careful balance could be no more evident in any aspect of my instruction of the target language than it is in the skills of pronunciation and oral proficiency. The reality is that a person can study French, Spanish, or any language for years and never be

proficient at the native level. For this reason I must provide an engaging atmosphere in which each student can perform to the best of his or her ability with satisfaction in order to maintain interest and momentum.

Traveling with students has given me insight with respect to each student's perspective and needs. Each time I have traveled with students to Paris, many of the same sites are a part of the tour such as the Eiffel Tower, Notre Dame Cathedral, and the Louvre. However, each visit is different for me as well, for I see each monument, each museum through the eyes of a new group of students. How captivating it was for me to visit the Louvre with a student who lived for art. She sketched and photographed her way through this museum in a way that I had never before witnessed. She viewed sculptures from multiple angles and provided me with insights for future trips, giving me an appreciation that further expanded my ability to present art in the classroom.

My beliefs regarding teaching form a cyclical pattern, for I believe that the expectations that I have of my students are the same that I have for myself. Hence, I contend that it is my responsibility to prepare students for the workplace; and ultimately, my philosophy of teaching maintains that there is

no end to learning. Just as our educational quest as teachers continues to keep pace with an ever-changing world, I must similarly equip my students to be adaptive in preparation for their futures.

Carol Foltz
Mooreville Consolidated School Corporation
Neil A. Armstrong Elementary School
Grade 1

“Every student needs to know they are valued for their individual qualities.”

Teaching is a wonderful and rewarding profession. In this profession feelings are shared, dreams are born, hopes are realized, knowledge is learned and applied, and hopefully success is the result. It is imperative that we continue to keep this alive and growing for our students. We can do this through our personal and professional examples and by providing our students opportunities for this to occur.

Every student needs to know they are valued for their individual qualities. In our classrooms we need to promote such an environment that our students want to be there. We need to help them see how important they are to the classroom. We should share our enthusiasm and desires with our students so hopefully they will become excited about their learning. My teaching gives me this opportunity.

Each and every child is special and deserves a safe and respectful learning situation. Students learn in many different ways and in teaching we need to address all of the learning styles that they have. In the classroom a child should be able to find and feel success no matter what their learning style may be.

Children have certain expected rights at school. They have the right to feel they are in a safe environment, the right to feel loved and valued, and the right to feel important to themselves and others. I believe my classroom allows my students to feel responsible, significant, and capable of many things. They are continually given opportunities to learn and share in many ways. I use many methods of teaching to ensure that my students learn in their own particular way.

Teaching has many rewards. There is nothing more fulfilling than knowing that your students want to do their best for themselves, their class, and for you. This action lets you know that all of the efforts that you have put forth have been successful and that the students are hopefully on the path to lifelong learning. Rewards also come in the form of a morning smile and hug, a scribbled note or picture they made just for you, students returning to visit years after having had them in my class, being invited to recognition banquets at graduation, parents requesting their child be placed in your room, thank you notes and letters of support and appreciation from parents, and reading or learning about the successes of former students. These are

just some examples of why teaching makes me feel honored and fulfilled.

I believe that all students have the right to be treated fairly. Each student's background and life experiences are very different. One of my jobs is to ensure that all children are given every opportunity to learn in my classroom. Each child wants and needs to feel valued. I strive to show my students the concern, caring, devotion, enjoyment, and respect that are important to their being able to learn regardless of what their level may be.

Joann Gantz
Center Grove Community School Corporation
Center Grove Middle School North
Grade 7 Language Arts

"It is my responsibility to be prepared to meet their ever-changing needs, wants, and desires."

Teaching is vital because it is a catalyst in helping young people find out who they are and where they are going in life. To be a part of this valuable profession is indeed an honor. It is my firm belief that **ALL** students can learn. Breaking down curriculum goals into small-step objectives through personal guidance and direction takes perseverance. It is my job to share knowledge and information, but more importantly, it is my job to give my students the necessary skills to become successful in life.

Making the standardized curriculum attractive to current teen interest is my way of raising the level of motivation and engagement of my students. Relevancy is an important component of success in the classroom. Many of my writing prompts stem from newspaper articles, current community stories, and classroom interests. When students make real-world connections, powerful learning takes place. Every class has a personality of its own, and I thoroughly enjoy this variety. I challenge each class to use their background knowledge to develop writings that will result in advanced thinking skills.

Besides the academic connections, I challenge myself every day to make

connections with the various students who walk through my door. It is my responsibility to be prepared to meet their ever-changing needs, wants, and desires. When I plan a lesson, I start with the same question, "How can I make this real?" With a positive approach, zany techniques, and sometimes "hairbrained" ideas, I attack and attack the 7th grade standards. I have been known to dress up as Tom Sawyer, declare war on grammar, and create skits/songs/poems with silliness but with a desired intent for learning.

In order for all students to learn in my classroom, I strive to be fair and firm with them and faithful to educational expectations. Students will respond best in an educational environment when clear guidelines are set, trust is established, and the lines of communication are open between student and teacher. Creating a learning environment to meet the needs of all students is always a top priority. I feel I am demanding but fair, conscious of learning styles, and an active and positive communicator. My dedication to the teaching profession is evident by my willingness to accept change, to embrace innovative techniques, and to always, always be an advocate for all students.

The rewards in teaching are immediate *and* delayed. One of my greatest pleasures is to see the smile of a student who has finally conquered the frustration of not being able to figure out a concept and then suddenly “the light comes on.” There is no greater reward! With age, maturity, and experience comes a certain amount of reflection and wisdom that adds a new dimension to the teaching process. Many of my former students have shared with me their new understanding of values and concepts taught during their middle school years. It is the icing on the cake when you hear that you have made a difference. I use these personal conversations as encouragement and motivation to my spirit as a teacher.

As I reflect back on my thirty-five years of teaching experience, I can honestly say that I truly love my job. Teaching has been a confirmation of my passion for young people. This passion will continue after my retirement from the organized classroom setting to extend into other outreach opportunities in the community. Simply stated, my passion for teaching consists of passing on the love of learning, making it an engaging process, and opening hearts and minds to life’s possibilities. Teaching is not just a job or even a career; it is my life ministry.

Susan Geesa
Greenfield-Central Community School Corporation
Harris Elementary School
Grades 3-5 SPMH

*"It is my mission to assist my students in becoming the best
that they can be."*

"BE A PAL" is an acronym that describes some of the most important principles, which I believe is necessary for working with the students in my classroom. The acronym stands for Belief, Enthusiasm, Acceptance, Positive Attitude and Love. These words describe what students need and deserve from others.

The students in my class have many different abilities and potentials. It can be challenging to provide stimulation and excitement for this diverse group of students. For my students to be excited and motivated, my assistants and I must demonstrate excitement and motivation. I realize that the energy must flow from my assistants and me to the students through our physical activity, vocal enthusiasm, facial expressions, and any other stimuli that we can provide. The students also work harder when a trusting relationship has been developed.

With my students not being as mobile and exposed to the environment outside of the classroom, I must bring parts of the world to the students. These can include anything from playing with leaves, building snowmen, experiencing scents, identifying objects by touch, listening to music, and

meeting community helpers and other visitors. It became apparent to me in my early teaching years, the needs of the students and their families extend beyond their needs at school. I often noticed at school, student behavior that reflected medical, nutritional, and social challenges. I knew that I had to become involved beyond the school doors and beyond school hours.

It is imperative that I have daily communication with each student's family because many of my students have severe communication deficits. Notebooks, which travel daily from school to home for parent-teacher notes, are provided. Phone calls and e-mails are exchanged with parents often. Parents and extended family members are encouraged to visit our classroom.

Scheduling and organizing outings such as bowling, swimming, museum visits, zoo visits, and other enrichments is a major part of my curriculum. I realize that students with exceptionalities are not always included in similar activities as their peers and I work to make those opportunities available to them whenever possible. Examples of those programs have been summer day camps with an overnight camping experience, monthly

school activity nights, after school Special Olympics programs, peer buddy programs, special needs bowling league, and attendance at community events. It is just as important for others to witness the student's involvement as it is for the students to be involved.

As I observe fellow colleagues, I am reminded how important it is to stay fresh with the educational process. This is especially true for teachers of students with severe physical and mental handicaps. It is a goal for me to not only provide an appropriate academic program for each student, but also to be knowledgeable of the current research on medical and physical issues that are unique to each one of them. It is equally important for me to be able to educate others about our students. My quest for learning will never stop as long as I am educating others. It is my mission to assist my students in becoming the best that they can be.

I highly value the numerous opportunities to reach out to others and to educate and improve the lives of students, their families, and the community. Lucky for me, I am rewarded many times each day when I see a light appear in the eyes of the students who I am privileged to serve. Witnessing their achievements, no matter how big or small, is the best reward of all.

*"I believe it is my professional obligation
to serve as a role model for young educators."*

My personal philosophy of education was formed through many mentors, dedicated and ambitious colleagues, and the children that I serve. Building relationships with my students and their families has been a cornerstone of my beliefs of education. A quote from Joseph Foubert touches my philosophy of teaching: "Children have more need of models than of critics." I consciously model the behaviors that I want my children to exhibit. Visitors to my classroom often comment on my soft voice, affirming mannerisms, and genuine concern for each student. In an effort to continue learning and our relationship into the summer, I write letters to each child every two weeks, reminding them to visit the library, be kind to their siblings, and write back to me. Upon returning to school in August, I am tickled to hear of the number of children who ran to the mailbox in anticipation of receiving a letter. Likewise, I am always touched when I receive a note from past students who have invited me to their commencement ceremony, wedding, or to say that I inspired them to pursue a career in education.

Teaching is a demanding career, generally, educators work hours each day past the contracted time. Meetings

to discuss curriculum, students' needs, and daily planning are all necessary to maximize the learning opportunities for our children. Despite the time commitment, teaching, for me, holds many rewards. Foremost in my mind, is the pride and satisfaction that I feel knowing a former student of mine has experienced success. The accomplishments may be in the form of a high school or college graduation, a community service opportunity, military service, or employment. It's a pleasure to reflect on the former student as a younger child, knowing that possibly, I assisted him along the current path to becoming a contributing member of our community.

Similarly, I am equally rewarded when a young teacher that I have mentored develops into a confident and competent educator. With twenty-two years of teaching experience, I seek opportunities to assist beginning teachers. Often, I recall the struggles that I encountered in my early years of teaching. Without several strong mentors to direct me, I am certain that I would not have developed into the teacher that I am today. I believe it is my professional obligation to serve as a role model for young educators. This belief is put into action through supervising student teachers, inviting high

school cadet teachers into my classroom for a semester, and by after school conversations with young colleagues.

Outstanding educators may share similar qualities or traits in their teaching style. A strong passion to work with children, a sense of humor, and flexibility are at the top of long list of desirable attributes. My teaching success may be due in part to a strong work ethic, a willingness to listen and learn from others, and expertise brought about by many years of classroom experience. However, one of my strongest qualities may be my compassion and concern for my students' well being both in and outside of school. In my current teaching assignment, nearly 57% of our student population experience poverty in their lives. Recently, one of my students needed corrective lenses to wear while reading. His family was unable to purchase glasses, so my student arrived at school wearing his mother's lenses. Fortunately, through a dear friend of mine who worked for an optometrist, we were able to provide a free pair of glasses for this needy child. This is one example of the ways that I try to make a difference in the lives of the students and families I serve. Each day I strive to make a conscious effort to provide a safe and supportive classroom environment that is reflective of my teaching values.

Stacy Griner
Mt. Vernon Community School Corporation
Mt. Vernon Middle School
Grade 8 Science

"I challenge my students to be their best and they challenge me as well."

*"Good teaching is one-fourth preparation
and three-fourths theater."*

—Gail Godwin

I was born to teach! A wise person once said that JOB stands for "just over broke." I don't have a "job," I have a career and a passion. I've tried other professions and none have elicited the wonderful feeling I get from being a teacher. My teaching philosophy is simple. First and foremost, I am passionate about student involvement in my classroom. I provide frequent labs and activities and search constantly for new methods to reach them. I want them to be excited about science and learning. Secondly, I encourage their development outside the classroom. I love to interact with my students in a capacity other than at school—in the community. This is my home!

My students are exposed to a high level of energy in my classroom. I find them eager to participate in frequent laboratory experiments and activities—most notably "Walk on Water." When students are engaged in applicable experiences like this, they are more likely to retain more knowledge. Therefore, I insist on engagement in my classroom. I strongly believe that a variety of methods of teaching will

effectively reach every student in my classroom. I challenge my students to be their best and they challenge me as well. I hope my passion and desire to inspire is contagious.

An effective teacher also cares about students on a personal level. I am involved in extra-curricular activities to get to know students outside of the classroom. Attending dances, sporting events, concerts, chaperoning trips, and sponsoring charity events are but a few ways I show students that I am committed to them. I agree with the philosophy that active, involved students do better academically, so I encourage achievement outside of the classroom.

A fellow colleague asked me, "Where do you find time to do all this extra stuff?" I replied, "It's just as much fun for me to teach as I hope it is for them to learn." To see these children grow to become respectable young men and women makes me proud to be a part of the Mount Vernon community. This is incredibly rewarding to me as a person, parent and as a teacher.

Lesleigh Groce
Franklin Community School Corporation
Franklin Community High School
Grades 9-12 Family and Consumer Science

"Sometimes the lessons need to wait and the kids need to talk."

Teaching is a recipe. Students, like baking, have their own special amount of care and compassion that they need. I have never been able to put it into better terms other than to relate it to food, which is what I teach every day.

In my classroom, I teach the kids about humidity and barometric pressure and how temperature and air circulation changes your recipe, cooking time and if the cookies burn and can be eaten or not (this is what they really care about). I never realized the students would be the same as the flour I was putting into the bowl. I have taught for nine years and it is amazing what I have learned from the kids. Every day is an adjustment to the recipe. Some days it goes exactly how it is written (in the plan book) and some days you totally have to make it up as you go. My mamaw taught me how to make many of the recipes that I still make today and teach to my daughters and students in the classroom. She was famous (in our family) for saying "you just have to mix it until it looks right." I often wondered what that meant, but I think I know...

Teenagers are a force to be reckoned with! One day they are happy, the next minute their boyfriend broke up with them and they are sad, the next they

got an A and they are happy again, the next their friend got the same phone that they had and they aren't "original" anymore and so on. I think it takes a very special person to teach this student. I never wanted to be a teacher. All of my parents' friends were teachers and I swore that would never be me. Little did I know this would be the job that I would get to go to every-day not have to go. This age of kid is why I get up in the morning. I love to watch their ups and downs and be there to catch them when they are about to drop out. I truly think this is why I became a teacher!

As far as what makes me an "outstanding" teacher, I am not sure that I am that. The kids say that, but I never consider myself outstanding by any means. I believe that what makes teachers someone that kids want to come to school to see is someone that takes time to care about the kid. I had many teachers when I was in school that didn't even know my name. I told myself the first year that I would know something about my students. I have them do a presentation about themselves. In this they can tell me whatever they want about themselves. This always gives me "material" to talk to them. I can also relate some part of myself or my family to them. That

makes me a person. I honestly thought some of my teachers lived in that school and never left. I also think that makes me more approachable. If students know about you, they can come to you with problems that they know you can relate to them.

My personal teaching style is a very simple recipe:

1 million cups of sugar
503 bags of flour
Pinch of kindness
Hours of lesson planning
Days of grading
1 big hug DAILY
Pounds of mascara on your shoulder

The mascara part may sound funny, but I have a ton of girls come and cry on my shoulder. Sometimes the lessons need to wait and the kids need to talk. I usually sneak in the lesson without them knowing I even did it!! In this day and age, sometimes the kids need to know that you care. So if I had to pinpoint a certain philosophy of teaching, it would be to care about them, listen to them, and teach them the lessons far beyond the text. They will appreciate that far beyond the test.

Philip Habegger
Concordia Educational Association
Concordia Lutheran High School
Grades 9-12 Mathematics

“Learning is a way of travel, not a destination!”

A first grade teacher in front of the room is pointing to a phrase on the board. She calls on a child to read the phrase. Then she moves to the next phrase. Suddenly I realize that I know how to read the next phrase. I wave my hand excitedly! Read it correctly! What a moment! Yes, the learning moment, I lived for these moments as a student. I was hooked! I still live for these moments as a teacher. Learning is a way of travel, not a destination!

Later, I would benefit from other teachers who could help me see the light. Mr. Tom Agler with his sense of humor made history come alive. Miss Glendenning, my fifth and sixth grade teacher, simply expected you to do your best. Mr. Hedges wanted you to know algebra. It goes on and on. My parents encouraged me to always do my best. I choose teaching because it is learning and that still affords the greatest joys!

Over the years, I've seen confidence exude from students discovering the joy of learning. Students frequently share with me that I inspired this joy in them. The legacy grows! Numerous former students are now teachers, consultants, and administrators.

God blessed me with a gift enabling me to influence others to love learning, to

share what they learn with others, and to become learners for life. My greatest contribution is sharing this gift with others, both students and colleagues, over more than four decades. I am immensely blessed, thankful, and joyful to start year forty-five this September.

What have I accomplished? I simply enthusiastically share my joy for learning with immense encouragement and passion. This is teaching and this is all I want. I have it all!!!

In the sixties, I struggled in teaching, I was learning. I just had no idea how long it takes to learn how to teach. Not all students came to my classroom with the interest, the home support, or the experiences that facilitate learning. Learning how to meet the needs of all kinds of learners required time and effort combined with professional development. It became apparent early that effective teaching was dependent on growing and teaming.

Eventually success increased and I received opportunities to share my knowledge and experience with colleagues in the areas of professional development while remaining in the classroom. Wow! I was now learning more from them. We were all growing

and improving our teaching abilities. This collaboration was fantastically rewarding.

The early nineties provided opportunities involving former students as colleagues. Now we were teaching each other, sharing techniques and successful practices, challenging each other's rationale and growing as teachers. We discussed, argued, cried, and improved while supporting each other. These experiences provided additional rewards and fond memories. The legacy grows and grows.

The professional growth continued to create opportunities to share. Presentations on cooperative learning groups, integrated math science English activities, spreadsheets in the mathematics classroom, software for math, and many others were given at the national, state, and local levels.

I am blessed! The notes from former students, parents, and staff verify accomplishments. Simply, I teach, because I CAN... and I MUST!!

Clark Hadley
MSD of Martinsville
Martinsville East Middle School
Grades 6-8 Science

“... I believe that students have to be actively involved in the classroom.”

I believe teaching is important work. That was the main reason that I chose it as a profession 37 years ago. Even after all this time, on that night before the kids come for their first day in class, I still have a hard time going to sleep. I know that I am going to have an impact on those kids' lives and I want it to be a positive one. The first impression is extremely important for getting the school year off to a good start.

I'm not naive enough to think that I am going to reach every student or that every student is going to learn or even remember all of the things that are being “taught.” They will remember how they were treated; they will remember that I had a passion for what I teach and that I cared about doing a good job for them.

I don't care if my students become scientists or not. I do care that they can appreciate the world they live in is a fascinating place. I care that they be able to think and to reason; that they can make observations and provide possible explanations for what they observe. I care that they see learning as a good thing without any other external reward. I want them to think that the experience they have in my class, and in school, is worth paying tax dollars to get.

To that end, I believe that students have to be actively involved in the classroom. I don't care if the student is middle school or middle aged, just sifting and listening to information isn't going to be effective. Students want to “do” and if I as the teacher can provide interesting opportunities to “do” then learning will take place. I grew up watching “Mr. Wizard” and more recently “Bill Nye, the Science Guy” on television. They were good programs, but I believe I can do a better job in the classroom than they did on TV because I can get the kids to do the science. Would you rather watch someone pull the tablecloth out from under the dishes or would you rather actually pull the tablecloth out from under the dishes yourself? We do this activity as one of many to learn about the first law of motion, but there is a rule I have the kids follow: If they perform this activity at home for their parents and the dishes stay on the table, they explain that we did this in class to explain the idea of inertia. If the dishes go crashing onto the floor, they are to tell their parents that they saw the activity on TV!

And that is the reward that I get—to see kids anxious to come to class, excited about what they will get to do today. That makes the work satisfying and fulfilling and fun for me.

Tania Harman
South Bend Community School Corporation
Warren Primary Center
Grades 1 and 2 English as a New Language

“My core belief is that each child, no matter his or her personal circumstance, deserves an excellent education.”

My core belief is that each child, no matter his or her personal circumstance, deserves an excellent education. Thomas Morell said, “The first great gift we can bestow on each other is a good example.” This belief is revealed in the five principles that guide my teaching: 1. EVERYONE can learn. 2. There needs to be a partnership among the student, family, and teacher. 3. Students need a strong foundation in the basic elements of reading, writing, and mathematics. 4. Teachers must be pro-active in meeting the needs of all students. 5. When students have high self-esteem, they will stretch themselves beyond what others thought was imaginable. These are not the values that immigrant families experienced in their native countries. I am rewarded when my students and their families realize that they are getting a good education.

EVERY STUDENT MATTERS! My students and their families come from distant lands. For many, I am the first glimpse into the American educational system. Most of my students, and their families, know little or no English when they walk into my classroom. It is my greatest reward when I see these students able to listen, speak, read, and write in English by the time they leave my classroom, and I see their families actively involved in the school. No

matter how they arrived here, and for as long they are with me, to be an outstanding teacher I will help them understand the core values of the American educational system. All of my students and their families feel welcomed and trusted by me, and they know that they count. Marie Clay stated, “A classroom for new entrants must be an environment in which the child becomes aware of the need for reading and writing in everyday life.” My classroom exemplifies this environment. Some of my students, and many of their parents, have never been in a classroom before arriving in this country. My classroom is print-rich to promote literacy. My style is purposeful and motivational and engages students in order to develop better people.

Having limited English, or not speaking the language at all, is not a barrier to learning. It is merely an indication that a different approach is necessary. I expect EVERY student in my class to meet and exceed grade level expectations. Research shows that if a child is literate in his native language, he will quickly become more proficient in his new language. For this reason, I use their native language, whenever possible, to increase student comprehension. I incorporate the Indiana Limited English Proficient Standards and the general Indiana Standards in all of the lessons I teach.

The students in my classroom quickly feel at ease and confident enough to be risk-takers in their learning. As they trust me more and more, I am able to take the focus off my thinking, and honor their thinking. This gradual release of responsibility in learning places the power for learning into the hands of the students. Rather than just equipping them with a collection of skills, I am giving them strategies that will support lifelong learning.

Students are more successful when there is a partnership among the students, families, and teachers. The students and I are working together daily, but we also need the parents' support and involvement. Very few of the parents I work with speak English, so I seek out ways to make them feel comfortable in the school, and to help them to be of assistance to their children. Quarterly parent meetings for ENL families, which dealt with topics ranging from ways to aid their children to community services available to them, were planned and implemented by me. To focus on the values and traditions of these families, I organized cultural events. The ENL families helped to host these events and served as the "experts." Their native language is implemented into programs and activities at school to make them feel both welcomed and valued. Parents' perception of schools and of this country is enhanced because they know that they are important to me, so this makes them more eager to be involved.

There was very little emphasis placed on education in many of the countries my students immigrated from. Few of their parents have gone beyond sixth grade. The villages they came from may have only had a teacher once or twice each month. Their foundations are not very strong. To improve this, reading, writing, listening, and speaking are woven together through the Balanced Literacy Framework in my classroom, which enables students to connect their learning. That framework has been adapted in math so that my students get explicit daily instruction in new math concepts and problem solving.

Teaching is a privilege that enables me to passionately inspire students, colleagues, parents, and me—What greater reward can there be than this?

My classroom projects a loving, nurturing environment that promotes student learning and high self-esteem. Students are rewarded because they know that they are important members of our team.

It is very bittersweet when the year comes to an end. Each year ends with a bit of magic. As we wave goodbye to one another and the pictures of learning replay in our minds, we are sad to let go of each other, but we both know that the students are well prepared for what lies ahead!

*“Highly effective educators find and
use educational moments as they pop up.”*

The teaching profession is not for everyone as is apparent as we witness men and women exchanging their classrooms for some other career paths. While some people leave the realm of education to seek monetary advancement, territorial relocation, or some other valid reasons, some are leaving because they lack the “teacher gene.”

I believe that some people are inherently better educators than others because they possess this “teacher gene.” Within true educators there is a desire to share their knowledge with others. They believe that what they have to impart upon others is valid, educationally important, and necessary for future use. These teachers, the ones who possess the “teacher gene,” are committed to education and their students. I believe that the most committed teachers are great educators.

I believe that what makes me an outstanding teacher is that I am committed to doing the best job in the media center that I can. When I was a middle school English teacher, I know that I was determined to impact my students’ educational lives by being fully prepared every day and ready to assist their learning in my class. I feel

the same now as the school corporation’s media specialist. Not only am I responsible to our student body; I must assist and answer to my colleagues whenever called upon. I feel a strong commitment to both parties.

Without being totally committed to education, I feel that one is simply putting in time and should vacate the premises immediately! We’ve all known teachers who should have left years before they actually did, and the reason they should have left is that they were no longer committed to making an educational difference in their students’ lives. Not all educational differences derive from textbooks, either. Highly effective educators find and use educational moments as they pop up.

Some ways that I demonstrate to my students and to my staff that I am completely committed to my teaching position as their media specialist is to be able to simplify their class work by locating materials, answers, and possibly equipment that they require. The library is always open by 7:00 a.m., and the students and the staff know that I will stay open as late as I need to for them to use the facility. The students and the staff, including the administration, know that I am deter-

mined to find answers for them whenever asked to do so. Sometimes both parties will politely curtail my assistance by claiming that they have plenty of materials but will ask for more if they need to.

In addition to locating books, databases, and equipment for my patrons to use, I feel that one of my greatest strengths is that I genuinely care. I care about the students' successes (sometimes even when they don't), I care about assisting my teachers so that their lesson plans are top-notch, and I care about my job. I want others to know that teaching is important to me, and I feel that I demonstrate that daily in the media center. If my students leave the media center with the impression that dedication, empathy, and passion for work are assets, I think that is a plus for education.

The rewards of teaching have to be unparalleled to any other profession. I, like many other teachers, squirrel away thank-you notes or photographs or Christmas presents selected with sincere care. Those items mean a great deal to me because I can take them out and study them over and over again and recall the student from who the treasures were given. It is also the nontangible rewards of teaching like hearing a mumbled "thanks" or seeing the "light bulb" click on or even receiving an occasional hug that sustain a

teacher. I was touched when a former student came back to tell me that he earned his GED and when a young man came to share the news that he was a new father. I have been in students' weddings, asked to bridal and baby showers, and out to dinners with former students. These rewards from teaching have added a dimension of wealth to my life because I am committed to my career and to my students.

*Students don't care how much we know,
until they know how much we care.*

I am entrusted with valuable treasures more precious than any metals, stones, or jewels. These treasures are the hearts, lives, and minds of the students of whom I am privileged to teach. There's a reflection of brilliance that shines from children. Their future accomplishments have the potential to yield a great harvest of positive change that can be felt the world around. Like a small pebble cast into a pond, these treasures are ours to polish and prepare for their journey ahead. We get to do this everyday, day after day.

The International Baccalaureate designation that our school lives by makes a huge difference in how I teach. The inquiry-based learning, coupled with constructivism and the instructional approaches we have found and proven to be best practices all encompass a fertile location for growth and a flourishing location to develop for students.

I believe what makes me an outstanding teacher is that I care, and the students know I care. No one is fooling anyone and we all know it. We are genuinely excited to see each other each school day. We care because we contribute to the quality of each other's lives. We laugh together; we cry together; we learn together. This is life,

and school is part of life for us together.

Students don't care how much we know, until they know how much we care. Recently, I went dumpster-diving to retrieve a child's orthodontic retainer that was forgotten and left on a lunch tray. I had a tie on but it was so worth the look on the child's face when I handed her the retainer (I did have to stop her from putting it in her mouth though!) She is learning better from me and I have a great rapport with her now as anyone can imagine. This child knows that I care and is very receptive to my classroom instructional practices.

Some of my rewards in teaching come from the variety of the day itself, because within each day, potential successes abound. I do not believe in "spoon feeding" or lecturing to students about what I deem is important. Rather, I allow them to take an interest and ownership of their learning which means more to them and they are more likely to latch on as lifelong learners. Variety in the classroom keeps them engaged in learning and I thrive on the elements of student enthusiasm and anticipation of what I might have for them that particular day.

For example, I was teaching Spanish in a split Grades K-1 class and to make a typically “boring” topic of regular “ar-ending” verb conjugations, I decided to teach it differently. Rather than drill them, I engaged the class by teaching the verb “jump”—“saltar” in Spanish—by helping them onto a pogo stick. One child correctly conjugated the verb, but was afraid to jump. I reminded her of the International Baccalaureate principle of being a risk-taker to learn and grow. I then asked another student if he wanted to try the pogo stick after he correctly conjugated the verb. This boy is a special needs student who uses a wheelchair. To my students’ amazement, he got on that pogo stick and held on with all his might. I helped him “saltar” about 10 times. The class applauded him for his bravery and risk-taking. This boy’s courage inspired the other girl to rethink her fear. She also tried jumping on the pogo stick. In a 20-minute lesson, student’s lives were changed in a way that I believe will be a lesson not soon forgotten

I have taught using many of these strategies in some of the most remote places of poverty, where academic disadvantages are the norm. Children, however, are the same everywhere. There are the reserved ones, the serious ones, the intense ones, the ones who seek to please, and the ones who act as if they can not be pleased. Still, underneath it all, we are all just

human beings who respond to the same things—genuine care and concern.

Laughter and love is the same in every language and caring is a much more powerful motivator than fear or disdain. Sometimes when students seem to be the least deserving of the love that we have for them, that moment is when they need it the most to break through to where they can be, not as they are seen them at the moment.

Stacy Hollis
Southwest School Corporation
Sullivan High School

Grades 11 and 12 English, US History, Dramatic Literature

*"I want my students to know that teaching to me
is much more than a job description; ..."*

THEN said a teacher, Speak to us of Teaching. And he said: No man can reveal to you aught but that which already lies half asleep in the dawning of your knowledge. The teacher who walks in the shadow of the temple, among his followers, gives not of his wisdom but rather of his faith and his lovingness. If he is indeed wise he does not bid you enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind. (Gibran)

My brother gave me this quote after I had been teaching for a while, and it has become my philosophy of teaching. There's much to be learned from this bit of wisdom by this somewhat obscure Lebanese-American author. First of all, one of the biggest obstacles for teachers to overcome is the idea that we must somehow "make" our students realize that the knowledge that we have to impart to them is important, and they *must* take it seriously! When it comes down to it, most serious students know that they need to take school seriously; that thought "already lies half asleep in the dawning of [their] knowledge" (Gibran). Instead of approaching them with a metaphorical club ready to pound the information in to their unrelenting heads, we need to first of all make them feel our warmth and enthusiasm for our subject... and for them.

As I mentioned in my Professional Biography, that's why I fell in love with teaching; I had teachers who imparted their love of knowledge and learning to me through their teaching styles, yes, but also through their ability to reach out to me, their pupil. That is my goal and intention with the students who pass through my door. Of course, teaching the State Standards and preparing them for the SAT and college, etc... are definite parts of my job, but I also strive to go beyond that. I want my students to know that teaching to me is much more than a job description; I truly care about the persons they are becoming, and I want to impart to them not only a love for learning (and particularly for finding timeless life-lessons through literature and a love for words) but also a love of life and the person that they can become in this life.

I hope to be the teacher who "walks in the shadow of the temple, among [her] followers, giv[ing] not of [her] wisdom but rather of [her] faith and [her] lovingness" (Gibran) toward life and hope in the future. Each student who comes into my classroom has individual gifts and unique abilities; sometimes they just need to know that someone cares and sees their uniqueness, and this gives them the confi-

dence to explore possibilities for their future. Once in a while I'll have the opportunity to work with one of these students in a one-on-one situation, and that is always truly thrilling. I have had the chance to mentor students as they have helped me during my prep as a student helper, and this year our building is coordinating a mentor program that I have offered to be a part of!

Don't get me wrong, I love what I teach, and I would love to believe that every student who sits in one of my desks will leave feeling a lifelong devotion to Hemingway or Poe, or that each student will walk away writing essays that would make Montaigne smile, but realistically I know this goal is a bit lofty! So, instead, I hope through my passion, my enthusiasm and my warm smile to, at the very least, take students to the point that they reach "the threshold of [their] own mind[s]" (Gibran) and realize that they have something worth striving for... something to become... something to do in this life that will not only make them contributing citizens, but also content people.

Works Cited

Gibran, Kahilil. "Teaching." *The Prophet*. 1 July 2008.

Tracey Iams
School City of Mishawaka
The Campus School, Joint Service Campus Program
Grades K-6

"I believe everyday that it is possible to make a difference in their lives."

From the moment I received our district teacher of the year award I have struggled with why I was chosen. I do not teach in a general education classroom, I do not even teach in a public school. I teach in a residential treatment facility. Children are sent here by the court system often from neighboring counties and even other states. Placement occurs after Child Protective Services determines the need to remove them from their homes due to neglect and abuse. The older ones have often been in trouble with the law and are involved in the juvenile justice system. The students in my class are Emotionally Handicapped (EH) and vary in ages. Grade levels in my self-contained classroom range from kindergarten to sixth grade. In spite of these challenges, I am determined that every day will be a new beginning.

After much introspection and thought I realize that I have been given this opportunity to be a voice for these children. These children are not unique to Mishawaka, Indiana, but live everywhere in America. Their voices desperately need to be heard. Early intervention could dramatically change and shape their futures. I believe everyday that it is possible to make a difference in their lives. We, as educa-

tors, need to learn how to effectively reach and teach these children in order to stop the almost certain perpetuation of the cycle of poverty from which they come.

It is difficult to put into words the rewards teaching brings to my life. My beliefs about teaching are evidenced in the way my classroom is run. The day I was hired I knew that I wanted my classroom to be a special place. I knew that it would be my mission to create a working community that the children would want to be a part of. The atmosphere in my classroom is comfortable, warm, inviting, and designed for elementary aged students. Student drawings and art projects are displayed. A new life skill is introduced weekly to be discussed, to role play, to read about and to model. We have a community circle discussion daily. Topics revolve around life skills, problems or issues, or academic skill reinforcement. Community circle time is a positive way to encourage sharing and respectful listening. We have a mini-economy system in our classroom. The students have jobs which they apply for on a bi-weekly basis. The student jobs motivate them to be involved in the way the classroom community is run. If they are not in school, they are missed because they

are needed. They get paid mini-economy money at the end of each rotation and we have mini-economy store each pay day. I strive to make learning as hands on as possible.

I could go on at length about the exciting and fun things that happen in my classroom daily. I truly love what I do and strive to make a positive difference in the lives of my students every single day. The perseverance, determination, and positive attitude that I model daily make me an outstanding teacher.

The most important wish I have for my students is that they learn to believe in themselves and find and experience good in the world.

*"It is the teacher who frequently plants seeds of interest
that germinate throughout the student's life ..."*

My teaching philosophy can best be explained in light of my beliefs about history and the role played by the teacher. History is our collective story. The story includes bravery and cowardice, brilliance and stupidity, integrity and dishonesty, honor and shame. Life's character lessons as well as life's most interesting characters are found here. These are fascinating stories and they need to be approached with enthusiasm and passion. Textbook chapters and State Standards provide a basic foundation, but time and again the classroom teacher proves to be the most important variable influencing student success. The teacher can make the story personal and real. He or she can illustrate how the story impacted the local scene. The teacher can guide students and assist them in making emotional connections with these important past events. It is the teacher who frequently plants seeds of interest that germinate throughout the student's life and lead to a long term love and appreciation for our collective story.

My classroom philosophy and approach are deeply rooted in the above beliefs. My approach emphasizes the use of numerous and varied methods to engage students in learning. Variety allows students of every learning style

and classroom trait to find opportunity for success. Over the years, I have become more and more aware of these learning differences and I have tried to continuously revise my instruction so as to connect with more students. Ultimately, the objective is to make the subject very real and have it come to life. Some of the methods I employ include simulations and reenactments as well as landmark photography projects and personal interviews. Students in my class will experience historical connections in a variety of ways. Here are some examples: Students fulfill conditions of indentured servitude and reenact Pickett's Charge. Were the 19th century industrialists robber barons or captains of industry? I convert my classroom into an economic marketplace with few rules and little government. Students see how the strong survive and a few can achieve great wealth. They write letters from the trenches of the Western Front shortly after spending a class period in the trenches and crawling across no man's land. A student in my class will either gain or lose a fortune in the securities markets of the 1920's. Students reenact the decision by President Truman to use atomic weapons in World War Two and fly the Enola Gay airplane. The sixties come alive as each student experiences a role

play lottery based on the military draft during the Vietnam era.

In my introduction, I mentioned my belief in planting the seeds of interest and how I want them to germinate throughout a student's life. I find my rewards and victories in teaching when I witness students engaged in learning and showing real interest in my favorite subject in new and different ways. At these moments, grades, tests and administrative tasks don't matter. The student learning and his or her reaction to it seizes my attention and makes me realize that I have chosen the correct profession. In one memorable instance a former student stated that "I remember getting excited about history because of Mr. Jehl; so excited that I decided to become a Social Studies teacher myself."

*“A classy person brings forth the best in others,
and the effect is immeasurable.”*

“The City Council asked me to carve a colossal [sculpture] from a nineteen-foot block of marble—and damaged to boot! I locked myself away in a workshop behind the cathedral, [and] hammered and chiseled ...”
—from the diary of M. Buonarroti

In that “damaged” block of raw stone given him, Mr. Buonarroti—better known today by his first name of Michelangelo—saw beauty. Think of that. Where others saw rock, Michelangelo found David.

As a teacher, I am Michelangelo. He felt the stone already contained the beautiful image. It was his job to release it. I see each student as a unique and beautiful creation whether it’s John who has spent more time at a behavioral center than in my classroom or Kendra who yearns to go to an Ivy League college. It is my responsibility to do whatever it takes to hone the beautiful image. At times I may need a chisel; other times simply a cloth to polish. But always I must see the beauty waiting to be released.

This is my philosophy of teaching, learning, and living. These, the tools of the sculptor:

Believe! The two greatest predictors of student learning are that the teacher believes the student will learn and the

student believes he/she will learn. Charles F. Kettering said, “Believe and act as if it is impossible to fail.” Navigation over the chasm of failure is my purpose. And so I build bridges. Nikos Kazantzakis (author of *Zorba the Greek*) stated, “Teachers are those who use themselves as bridges, over which they invite their students to cross; then having facilitated their crossing, joyfully collapse, encouraging them to create bridges of their own.” Until those bridges are built, I rely on my favorite 3-letter word—“yet.” When a student says, “I don’t understand,” I optimistically reply, “yet.”

Prepare to Conquer! Each math problem is an opponent, an enemy, a battle. As I tell my students, “No little math problem could possibly be better than you are.” With this mindset I coach my team to be ready for battle in order to conquer each opponent. We dedicate ourselves to the work that will enable our victory. We do not fly white flags of surrender allowing ourselves to fall into a victim mentality.

Fool Yourself into Fun! I am teaching mathematics, and I’m having a blast. I don’t have to fool myself into loving what I do, but at the onset not every student who walks in my room lists solving math problems as a

hobby... yet. However, enthusiasm, passion, and success are contagious. To change subtraction to adding the opposite, we say “En Garde, evil subtraction!” We take out our pencil and make the two necessary swipes of the sword. We exclaim, “Swipecy! Swipecy!” Are we role-playing? Absolutely! First we envision ourselves as conquerors, and with preparation we become conquerors. Contrast doing homework with the attitude of “I have to do this. I hate this.” with an attitude of, “Drum role please. Grace, the Great, is about to defeat the puny opponents offered up to her for this evening’s enjoyment!”

Strive toward Excellence! Why should we ever do less? I ask my students to imagine their tombstone saying: “Here Lies Joe. He strove toward mediocrity.” Inspiring? Hardly. Daniel Burnham, Director of Works for the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago stated, “Make no little plans; they have no magic to stir men’s blood.” I must stir my students toward excellence.

Exude Class! Class should emanate from our pores. Character is far more important than IQ. Class is treating all individuals we encounter with respect, dignity, and priceless value. Anyone can be classy regardless of intelligence. A classy person brings forth the best in others, and the effect is immeasurable.

My daily decision as a teacher must be to see others, not as rocks, but as priceless works of art. My charge is to find the David in every stone, the potential in every student.

*“Good teachers make an impact on students
that extends beyond the classroom; ...”*

I love learning; as a student, I have gained knowledge in many fields of study. The next level of becoming a life-long learner is sharing the knowledge I have acquired. As a music teacher, I have the opportunity to share my love of music and of learning in general, while teaching students by example to appreciate knowledge and the arts. I believe that truth is constant. I also believe in the enduring quality of great works of literature and music; students should study the best products of creativity that exist in order to learn about mankind's past, present, and future. Students do need to be met where they are in the learning process; however, they also must master a core of basic skills to prepare them for everyday tasks and for the rest of their lives. As a teacher, I strive to model respect, patience, honesty, and responsibility in working with students, administrators, peers, and parents. It is my goal to develop these same characteristics in my students, and my delight when I see them live them.

When I think of a teacher, I picture someone sharing information that is not previously known to the student. My foremost conclusion therefore is that a teacher is a communicator. She must have a strong command of

subject and language to be able to speak so that students can understand individual concepts as well as the broad scope of a lesson, skills I believe I possess. A teacher is also a decision-maker. She must be confident with choices, able to relate information, and be prepared to deal with unforeseen obstacles. Outstanding teachers have to be flexible and prepared to meet each challenge that arises. I experienced this first-hand this past year when it became necessary to carry out both the spring musical and senior trip without the assistance I had been expecting from colleagues; fortunately, the groundwork had been well-laid and both events were successful.

I wish to be a mentor for all areas of life to my students, and not be solely confined to the teaching of music. I desire respect in word and deed from students, and I strive to get to know them personally. However, I do not believe that a teacher should become extremely close or superficially friendly with her students. There needs to be concern for the student but also a healthy respect for their age and relative inexperience. I have an open-door policy; students know that I care and that I am available to listen to them, whether they want to practice or tell me about their weekend.

Good teachers make an impact on students that extends beyond the classroom; when students are interested in and focused upon their studies, they tend to be more vocal about them. You don't often hear students chattering excitedly about algebra or English grammar, but they do get excited about the team dynamics and sense of achievement they feel when they make music. I love watching students "get it," those "ah-ha!" moments give me great joy, and they inspire me and other students to keep on trying.

Students in the successful music classroom are encouraged to seek out enrichment opportunities that will reinforce what they've learned and introduce them to new performance venues. I share information in any way I can when I come across events that will help my students grow in their quest for knowledge.

Julia Majercak
MSD of Lawrence Township
Craig Middle School
Grades 6-8 English as a Second Language

"Relationships are the cornerstone of all exceptional classrooms."

Obviously, the English language learner and their teacher must overcome many challenges including limited English language skills, gaps in education, and low literacy in first and/or second language. But the culturally competent educator also looks at the strengths of the child, the diverse personal experiences, and the native language. By capitalizing on these assets, I can connect with my students and provide them with engaging opportunities for academic and language learning.

Project-based and service learning are incorporating into most every thematic unit taught. When we have studied the environment, students planned community cleanup days or planted a community garden. Students wrote letters to local experts, gathered donations, pulled weeds and cultivated vegetables. During a unit on honoring our ancestors, we created Dia de Los Muertos (Day of the Dead) altars and wrote biographies honoring those who had impacted our lives. Their art and writings was exhibited at the Indianapolis Art Center. There is a Mexican proverb that says "Lo que bien se aprende, nunca se pierde." ("What is learned well, never is lost"). Amazing knowledge, sharing, and most impor-

tantly, cultural pride comes from such projects.

Effective teachers use authentic assessments to determine what students know and can do, and the results are used to improve instruction. I have realized the need to supplement my self-created assessments with a more formal and research-tested assessment program. Now I am able to effectively target instruction for the individual learner and provide teachers with specific strategies that will develop particular skills.

Children should be surrounded by books therefore I have set up an extensive leveled library in my classroom. Since I have an accurate reading level for each child, I can guide him or her in selecting books that are appropriate. I know the importance of tapping into home culture and the life of the child. I am constantly scouring bookstores and reading lists for multicultural literature to add to my classroom library. Although I generally frown up "one book-one class", I do an in-depth novel study of *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Muñoz Ryan with my 8th graders. For many of my ESL students, this is the first novel they have attempted. Many a reluctant

reader has been converted with this rich story that incorporates themes such as immigrant spirit, while capturing the beauty of a culture through vivid language and symbolism.

Since language is acquired through meaningful interaction, it is my responsibility to ensure that my students are engaged not only in my ESL classroom, but throughout the school day. In the past couple of years I have started “pushing-in” to content area classrooms. I am able to incorporate ESL strategies and model the implementation of the English Language Proficiency (ELP) Standards for the classroom teacher. The ELLs are able to access the rigorous subject matter and participate equitably through my collaboration with their teachers. An interesting and unexpected benefit has been the fostering of valuable cross-cultural interactions between the immigrant students and the American-born students.

Relationships are the cornerstone of all exceptional classrooms. The trust that I have built with my students and their families, past and present, defines who I am as a teacher. They left their homelands for a better life for their children and it is a great honor to serve a role in their attainment of the American dream and their goals for the future.

“... I focus on the positive and compliment to the fullest.”

*“A good teacher or coach must not only understand others but himself as well.”
— John Wooden UCLA coach*

Understanding others and how to motivate them is a tremendous advantage when you are teaching. Developing these interpersonal relationships will help support with students of all backgrounds and abilities as you work towards a common goal. Students will gain trust and respect, especially if you, in turn, share the same with them. Interpersonal relationships must be genuine because students will sense when you are fake or weak.

Understanding yourself (Interpersonal) and how you get others to accomplish great things in life are equally important. The lessons and beliefs that I have learned in life can be shared but may not always apply to others. I need to remain open and absorb all the different kinds of personalities and behaviors. That is why when meeting students at the beginning of the year, I take time to explain me. Why am I motivated and driven? What do I enjoy about what I do for a living? What upsets and pleases me? The best way to improve others is to improve oneself. “Try your hardest.” “Make the effort.” “Do your best because students need

models not critics.” Many of my students have accomplished awesome achievements ranging from international, national and state honors. Making the students believe in themselves and striving to become better is what makes me an outstanding teacher. I focus on the positive and compliment to the fullest. I haven’t forgotten how I worked and achieved in my success, so sharing this and motivating them to do their best allows success to build successful people. I choose to always build up students rather than tear down students and that is why they follow me.

*“The bar is raised for my students,
and they consistently meet the challenge.”*

My mission as an educator is to give every family who is a part of my classroom the opportunity to grow as a family unit and for each member of that family to grow individually. My philosophy of a successful learning environment takes the work of three spokes in a wheel: student, parents, teacher. All three must function as a unit, giving maximum effort, to achieve levels of success that are beyond our imagination. As the teacher, I am responsible for making sure all three spokes are strong.

I believe every student has the ability to learn. Each student who enters into a relationship with me, whether they are in my classroom or not, is uniquely special and is treated and educated accordingly. I tell my students, “I am not going to treat you all the same because you are all different.” Students are expected to learn to communicate effectively with me, their peers, and their parents. I expect students to say “please” and “thank you” every chance they get. I expect them to hug their parent every night and tell them “I love you Mom and Dad.”

Academically, students are challenged every day. They are expected to participate in group settings, partner set-

tings, whole class settings, and as individuals. Students in my room are rewarded for their successes, supported when they struggle, and held accountable for their actions. The bar is raised for my students, and they consistently meet the challenge.

Parents are expected to be active in their child’s life academically, socially, and emotionally. I often say, “Parental involvement is absolutely essential and irrelevant.” Children whose parents are supportive and involved in their lives are going to learn and a greater rate than those whose parents are not supportive. If a parent is not supportive or involved, I do not use that as an excuse to lower the expectation. That child needs to work harder, and I must provide opportunities for that child to succeed, be supported while in my care, and show them they are valued.

The following is the message I give to parents who entrust me with their students every day. 1) Learn to understand and value your child. You need to affirm your child through attention, affection, and appreciation. 2) Correct your child without condemning them. You must watch your words closely, not correct in anger, and remember that harmful words create harmful

memories. 3) You must be consistent with your child. You must keep promises, and if you say you are going to do something, you must do it. 4) Love your child unconditionally. You must never, never give up on your child and forgive your child when he/she makes mistakes.

As their teacher, parents and students can expect me to stay up-to-date on best practices, create meaningful lessons that meet the needs of all students, be an outstanding role model in and out of the classroom, and never ever quit on any student or family. The last thing, one that I feel is essential to life and learning, is we are going to have a great time. Students will laugh, smile, and walk with a spring in their step while we walk this journey called education together.

My greatest reward in education in building relationships and seeing students and families become stronger. My reward is getting an email from a former student who is excited beyond words that she was accepted into a nursing program and thanking me for my support, in and out of the classroom. My reward is seeing a family at the store and catching up how their family is doing. Education is not an isolated event. Education is the key to achieving your dreams and being all you want to be and more. I have the

honor and responsibility of making sure families are supported and encouraged while traveling this very difficult road.

*“Every student, no matter their cognitive level,
has a special talent or skill that they can excel in.”*

My teaching philosophy mirrors the FFA motto:

Learning to do, doing to learn, earning to live, and living to serve.

Learning to embrace this motto is one of the best things I can teach my students. It sums up in four short lines, steps that can lead to a successful, productive and serviceable life. I believe I am not only training agriculture students, but building solid citizens. I truly believe in stressing **character** as well as **content**.

I hope my students learn life lessons and problem solving skills that will help them with the challenges they will face later in life. I believe that first and foremost, I am in the opportunity business. It is my responsibility to provide all students as many opportunities as possible. For it is through these opportunities that they learn about themselves and what special talents or skills they possess, which in turn opens educational and career doors.

Every student, no matter their cognitive level, has a special talent or skill that they can excel in. When they have the chance to explore and find their

own special skill, it greatly improves their self-esteem and that just starts a cycle of life changing events. I have had the good fortune to get to watch students learn skills that change their lives. When they find that special talent that they didn't know existed, it makes them feel important and valuable. On more than one occasion I have seen a student in danger of dropping out or giving up, finally uncovering something they are truly talented at. Their self worth improves and often they gain confidence in other school subjects and all areas of their life. They gain a feeling of *belonging* and find the satisfying feeling that other successful students were lucky enough to find earlier in their educational career.

Instilling this self confidence and desire to learn must be tied to a rigorous and challenging curriculum taught with cutting edge methods in order to prepare them for an ever-changing world, and agriculture industry. They learn that to be successful they must become life long learners and constantly strive for improvement. As the John Glenn School Corporations Agriculture teacher I believe that is critical for me to be up to date on all the new technology and advancements in my subject area and make students aware and knowledgeable about these

advancements. I work very hard to build partnerships with local organizations or agencies so I have contacts when a student, or someone in the community, needs assistance. As the John Glenn School Corporations expert in agriculture, I have to serve as not only an educator, but as an ambassador for the agriculture industry and be able to advise students on all of the various aspects of the agriculture industry. Due to the fact that to many of the students and families I work with view agriculture not just as a subject in school, but as part of their culture, my duties require me to have active roles in other local agricultural organizations and events. Honestly, many of my most important responsibilities take place outside of the classroom. Whether it be at one of the three county fairs our students take part in, stacking sandbags along the banks of a flooding river, or helping a student break a calf to lead, many of my most teachable moments occur outside the four walls that make up my classroom. I am truly blessed to be able to teach a subject where theory and content of the course can be complemented with hands on practical experience. It allows me to reach all learners, and connect with them no matter their learning style.

We have a saying in the agriculture classroom... "once an aggie, always an aggie." I take this saying very serious

and try to promote an attitude of belonging to something special, that doesn't end when you graduate. I do my best to maintain contact with former students, and try to do what I can for them as they advance in their lives and careers. Often they become important resources that I can call on when we need help with a certain project, or can utilize their expertise in the classroom as a speaker, or helping provide SAE opportunities for current students. They always stress to me how much they value what they gained in agriculture classes and how much they enjoy being able to come back as an alumni, and do for current students, what someone had done for them years ago.

Put together, all of this fosters an attitude that education is important and something they must pursue for the rest of their lives, that they have valuable individual talents and skills that make them a important part of the industry, and finally, reinforcing the importance of service and giving back to the community in which they live, as pointed out in the last line of the FFA motto... *"living to serve."*

Elizabeth Murphy
New Albany-Floyd County Consolidated School Corporation
Highland Hills Middle School
Grade 7 English

*“Developing a child’s imagination is essential,
and teachers must help kids dream.”*

Teaching is NOT a “job.” It is a way of life, a calling, a passion. Every fall I get excited. I am constantly asking myself, *“How can I do it better?”*

Learning must be interactive between student and teacher. I share my own writing with them and try to create a warm and inviting atmosphere so students will *want* to join in class discussions and read *their writing* from the author’s chair in the center of the room. Through the years I have laughed and cried with my students, and *they* have taught *me*: humor and optimism; compassion and empathy; determination.

Around my classroom are book spinners and book cases. In my glass display cases are student mythology projects. Busts of famous authors and mythology gods and goddesses sit atop cabinets. Posters of authors and student writing cover my walls and bulletin boards. On my desk a digital picture frame runs a slideshow of students writing and performing in class. I want *both* my *classroom* and my *personality* to sparkle.

Every day I smile and inject enthusiasm and energy into my teaching, and above all, remember the words of my IU Methods instructor and beloved

mentor, Professor Edward B. Jenkinson: “Be prepared, be prepared, be prepared.” It is my professional duty to know my subject, stay current, and actively engage my students in class.

As an English teacher I want my students to travel to different places and times on the magic carpet of words and discover how books are, as author Stephen King calls them, “portable magic.” Developing a child’s imagination is essential, and teachers must help kids dream. But I also know I need to equip my students with writing skills that will empower them. I want them to recognize how words can persuade, words can throw light on evil, words can change the world.

My greatest reward is that almost daily I hear: “Is that *you*, Mrs. Murphy? Do you remember *me*?” This is usually accompanied by hugs and laughs and memories of times spent in my class. When Stacey, the sweet young waitress, rushes to my table and says, “I am majoring in English because of you,” I am humbled; when Angie at Papa John’s throws in lots of extra jalapeno peppers and garlic butter with the pizza upon discovering my husband is “*Mrs. Murphy’s* husband,” I am touched; how tickled I am when two young workers in the

McDonalds' window smile, wave, and exclaim: "Hey, it's *Mrs. Murphy!*"

I love waving to students as they ride by on their bikes or in cars as I am sitting on my front porch swing reading. Through the years I have loved having them Trick-or-Treat at my door on Halloween. I love being part of the community and sharing in my students' lives both inside and outside of the classroom.

I feel a sense of pride that I instilled in many a love of writing, literature, and theatre. I hope my students not only took away "The Preposition Song," the Six Traits of Writing, and the elements of plot, but I also hope they took away inspiration. I hope they came to know that words can change lives, critical thinking and reading are essential to maintaining a democracy, and they need to exercise those skills. I also hope I showed them literature, poetry, and drama feed the soul.

My greatest reward in teaching?
Knowing my life's work mattered.
Knowing maybe I made a difference in a student's life. Knowing I might have been the bright spot in some child's day. As Hazelwood assistant principal Terry Weilbaker said at the end of the year in 2004: "Sunrise, sunset ... another year has ended. We are blessed because we, of all people, impact the future in a very real way and on a daily basis."

“My job is not just to teach, but to ensure that my students learn.”

My philosophy of education revolves around the question: “What is best for this child?” I have 25 students in my class and I must ask myself this same question at least 25 times a day.

I love to turn subjects that my students are not initially interested in into something exciting. I do this by making it relevant to the kids. I compare everything to real-life experiences and always tell them why they need to know what I am teaching. I believe in project-based learning and love when students stumble upon answers themselves. There should not be one moment in my classroom where my students are not engaged. My teaching is hands-on, and we are a tiny community that learns together and supports one another in our learning.

It is so rewarding to motivate students to aspire to do something new, get them to believe that they can do it, and watch them achieve it in front of your eyes. We are a classroom that sets goals and we all celebrate when they are met. Excellence is a huge focus. We show excellence in our attitudes, our actions, and our achievement. It is our only rule.

I believe that there are only two types of teachers. Teachers are either “about

the teaching” or they are “about the learning.” You see, I know colleagues whose teaching skills are great, but are only about the teaching. Their philosophy is that since they taught the material required of them, their job is done. You might hear a comment such as “I don’t know why 5 of my students failed that test; I covered it in class.” Then there are teachers like me. I am ALL “about the learning.” Just like the other kind of teachers, I have also given a test in class where students have failed. The difference is this: My job is not done. My job is not just to teach, but to ensure that my students learn.

Why give an assessment if it isn’t going to change what you do in the classroom? Isn’t the goal of assessment to check that what you taught was learned? I have to admit, when your students don’t do well, it can cause more work on the teacher. That’s why differentiation instruction and RTI models are so imperative in my classroom. I give frequent, purposeful, assessments and change my teaching style to match the assessment feedback that I’ve gathered.

My teaching style varies often, but a few things remain the same. I always teach with a lot of enthusiasm. My

students think I am happy all the time. I always hear students say that I am always smiling, and unless they are being disciplined, they are right.

In the area of discipline, I believe that I am very restorative on what I do. My job isn't to punish the child, but to teach the child to repair the situation so that a better choice can be made in the future. I try to match consequences with the student's actions. If a student writes on his desk, he will help the custodian clean the desks. If he is making fun of another student, he will write a letter of apology to that student.

My ultimate goal in teaching is to turn my students into lifelong learners like myself. It is in the spirit of "As good as we are, we can always be better." I want to nurture my students and encourage them to continue growing socially, emotionally, and educationally.

Samara Newnam
Muncie Community Schools
Storer Elementary School
Grade 5 Gifted and Talented

*“... my words will make indelible impressions
on the young minds that sit before me.”*

I believe it is possible for me to touch the future every day that I walk through my classroom door. The lessons I teach each day, my actions, and my words will make indelible impressions on the young minds that sit before me. Many of those impressions will stay with my students for a lifetime, molding them and shaping them into the young adults they will become. This knowledge compels me to view teaching as an awesome responsibility; a responsibility that should not be taken on lightly, but with thoughtful and serious consideration. Teaching is both a science and an art and an outstanding teacher needs to be well versed in both arenas.

The science of teaching demands that I teach for mastery and that I use best practices to accomplish this goal. I need to be proficient in all content areas, and I need to use assessments to not only improve my teaching but as learning tools for my students. I find great satisfaction in pre and post test results because I can clearly see my students' academic gains. I work with my students on a daily basis, helping them to correct all work and making sure they master all skills. The science of teaching helps me guide my students in their pursuit of academic excellence; it also helps produce

competent learners, but I believe it is probably the art of teaching that sets outstanding teachers apart from others.

I take my job very seriously, but I am also enthusiastic and passionate about what I do; this is the art of teaching. I want learning to be fun, and I want my students to love it. In my classroom, the students master the content material and then they are asked to apply it. The application may take on the form of designing a cargo-carrying boat after studying density and buoyancy. It might be creating a literature circle project which details the setting and plot of a story or analyzes the characters. My students have built mousetrap cars and then demonstrated Newton's Laws of Motion, and they have created nonfiction picture books and designed model villages after studying Native Americans. The happy hum of engaged workers within a cooperative, problem-solving group is music to my ears.

I want content mastery; I want excited lovers of learning, but I also want students who serve their communities and are globally aware. An exemplary teacher needs to provide opportunities for her students to serve the community. Each year I help my students

actively serve our local community through various classroom projects. Additionally, I think it is vitally important to teach children to be culturally sensitive and to develop a genuine love and concern for other people groups throughout the world. I have tried to do this with my students by having them partner with schools in Australia, Egypt, Malawi, and Kenya. Students get to know each other through pen pal letters, and some of these relationships last for years.

Finally, I think an excellent teacher has to be a consummate classroom manager and motivator. The key to managing a classroom is preparation. Good teachers are always prepared in advance with innovative, well-thought-out lessons. They have a few understandable rules and lots of surprises up their sleeves. Utilizing my background in psychology, I have developed and implemented a unique motivational system that works. It pays to work hard in my classroom. Throughout the year, students can look forward to: Bonus Bucks, Bonus Balls, the Store/Auction, catered lunches from area restaurants, the Top Ten, an overnight camping trip to my farm, and the Queen's Bo; just to name a few. I can keep students happily working until the last day of school.

I touch the future every day through the science and art of teaching. I teach

my students to pursue academic excellence, to serve their community and their world, and to make a difference. I look forward to hearing of my students' future successes. After all, that is what motivates me to do what I do every day.

*“It is not enough to give grades;
I also need to let my students know I believe in them.”*

Teachers are parents at school. Like parents, educators are charged with teaching not just content, but with helping to develop the “whole” child. The development of today’s future citizens requires teachers to form relationships with students, to connect content with the community, and to be well prepared.

Creating relationships with students will increase learning. Students need to know that a teacher cares. I find myself being a mom, a counselor, and a cheerleader. At school, my students become “my kids” when I talk with them about making smart choices. They don’t always like what I have to say, but they listen to “Mom Nichols.” My kids often need advice in what classes to take, where to get a job, where to go to college, and how to handle personal and family problems. Without a personal relationship, my students wouldn’t even confide in me, and I would not be able to help. It is not enough to give grades; I also need to let my students know I believe in them. They know they can count on me to help before and after school. Sometimes it only takes my saying, “You can do it. I’ll help.” Celebrating with my students is also important. I let my students know that I am proud they

are a member of the speech team, the drum line, or the 2008 State Champion baseball team. After my students graduate, I enjoy going to their weddings or college graduations, showing them that they are just as important to me after they leave my classroom as they were when they were one of my students.

The world of work has changed from the industrial era and educational practices must reflect those changes. Students can’t be like Buff Loman in the *Death of a Salesman* when he says to his dad, “Pop! I’m a dime a dozen, and so are you!” Just learning content makes students like Biff Loman. To avoid this, I incorporate the 21st century skills of communication, interpersonal relations, problem solving, time management, and written communication in my lessons. My students have multiple opportunities to develop these skills as they learn content. After my students leave me to go on to the next grade, they will be expected to build upon this foundation of 21st century skills because as Thomas L. Friedman in his book *The World is Flat* remarks, “You have to constantly upgrade your skills.” Learning truly becomes life long as students upgrade these skills in postsecondary

education, future careers, community projects, and personal endeavors.

Students deserve the best, but I cannot be the best teacher by using the same lessons, giving the same worksheets, and using the same tests year after year. Being the best teacher means I am willing to take risks so my teaching does not become stagnant. My students entered the Lance Armstrong LiveStrong competition this year by designing a project around the theme: *What it means to live strong*. Instead of my telling the students what the project would be, they were given the freedom to design it. It was unsettling to give free rein to my students, but because I trusted the project-based model, I remained a facilitator and let them create their project for the competition. I was not disappointed. Each class created their own interpretation of what it means to live strong. Some of the elements of their submission were the creation of a t-shirt design, a fighting cancer video, an interactive website, a video game, and cancer survivor interviews including myself. Taking risks ensures that learning is alive for students and teachers, and education doesn't become stagnant.

Parenting my students is what I do daily without even thinking. It is just who I am. I approach my teaching just like I approached parenting my two

daughters: with love, discipline, knowledge, enthusiasm, respect, and pride. Watching the growth of my students educationally, emotionally, and psychologically is my reward for choosing teaching as my career. What other profession can brag about being a parent to over 100 kids every single year?

“Great teachers teach the why, not just the how.”

Great teachers should be knowledgeable in their subject area, but more than that they should be able to teach the subject material to their students. There are many knowledgeable people in this world, but not every one can be a true teacher. The knowledge is not enough if teachers cannot show how to use the subject matter and relate it to some area of the student's lives. Relevance to the real world is vital to reinforce the need for education. There are times, however, that all parts of a subject do not directly relate, but a good teacher can show that reasoning or problem solving skills are being learned which will be useful in any situation.

Excellent teachers should be involved in the school in more than just the classroom, as club advisors, coaches, mentors. Students like to see their teachers take an interest in their particular activities and to attend functions that show their talents and interests. Taking time to talk to individuals about their interests, can make a difference in the attitude a student demonstrates in a class. If they feel the teacher is interested in them as a person, they will work harder. I try to find out about my students, although with about 150 each year, it

is not always done the first week of school.

Cooperation with colleagues is vital in the ability of teachers to excel. Good teachers must communicate with the other teachers in their departments to ensure the same material in the courses are taught, concepts are discussed, and that new teachers are mentored and helped in all areas—discipline and school routine as well as subject matter. The math department at Bishop Dwenger is one of these departments that work together for the good of the students. Great teachers teach the why, not just the how. To have a student ask thought provoking questions of “what if...” should be the goal of every teacher. The teacher's response should not always be the answer, but could be an opening to class discussion and have the students explore the concept. Great teachers should also vary their teaching methods so that students with different learning styles have a chance to learn. Personally I like to put all of the students at the board at the same time –working on problems just presented. This gives those who learn by doing get to physically work the problem, and allows students to work together with peer tutoring. It also allows the high

school students to learn with a method other than pure lecture.

Great teachers must also be able to be corrected if they make a mistake. As a math teacher, I always encourage my classes to correct me if I make a mistake. I often do this purposefully early in the year so that they are not intimidated to correct. We look at homework on the boards each day and when I find errors, ask them to analyze the work by finding the mistake. Encouraging students to analyze a situation will help them when they have a problem to deal with once out of school.

Most of the rewards I receive teaching are related to student achievement and improvement. When tutoring students before or after school it is a joy when they finally get the concept, the light bulb goes on, and they now understand what to do. To have a former student send a note to say “thank you for caring”, “you were the reason I chose my profession”, “I’m going to be a math teacher”, etc. these reinforce that I am accomplishing my goals. Great teachers instill a love of learning and a desire to be productive citizens of the world.

Denise Oaks
Fort Wayne Community Schools
Lakeside Middle School
Grade 8 Language Arts and Reading

*“I demand a great deal from my students
but back it up with support, encouragement, and love.”*

My philosophy of teaching is one that I believe has been with me since the first day I did my student teaching at East Chicago Central; it is part of who I am as a person and carries me throughout each day. I believe that each student who comes into my room is capable of learning and behaving with the proper classroom atmosphere and that it is truly my job to “make it happen” for each student. As I work with the students in my classroom, I make it a priority to remember that every single face comes to me with his or her own story. The story is not one I can change or control; however, I can build a relationship with the students I serve in order to create a safe haven in my room where chances and efforts are welcomed and where all students feel at home. I realize that until that relationship of trust and concern is built, the full potential of what my kids are capable of will not be fulfilled.

Throughout my career, I have had so many different types of learners, but they all had one thing in common—they had hope. One of the most important things I have learned over my years with FWCS is that one of my main jobs is to instill a sense of hope into the students; they need to be able to believe that they can do the work,

finish a project or essay, get up in front of the class to do a speech, or even just complete my course with a passing grade. Through differentiation of instruction and establishing a positive rapport with the students, I am able to motivate the students, regardless of their ability level. Again, I clearly understand that it is my job to do whatever it takes to “make it happen” for each child.

Each year on the very first day I tell the kids that together we are going to get them prepared for high school and also ready to “conquer” the ISTEP. I tell them that we are “all in this together” and can accomplish many things if we work together as team. Because I taught high school for several years, I can share with them personal stories of how some of my students were not able to graduate due to lack of credits or because they were unable to pass the GQE. I let them know that part of the reason I switched from a high school setting to a middle school setting is so that I can start earlier in helping kids realize that school is no longer just about getting the grades—it is about TRUE LEARNING. In addition, I tell them how important it is to learn and gain the skills they need for life and emphasize

that I am going to do everything in my repertoire of teaching skills to empower them for success.

There are few things in life in which I would feel comfortable saying that I would be classified as “outstanding.” However, there is one gift that I have been blessed with that I could confidently shout from the mountain tops that I truly love, have passion for, and feel that I am exceptional at doing—teaching. Since the day I started teaching, I have felt I was one who was a “natural.” Although all days in my career have definitely not been perfect, I have never struggled professionally in any particular way. Instead, I have always excelled at classroom management and motivating students; I can honestly say that I have a tremendous amount of talent in the area of teaching.

Two things that make me stand out as a teacher include my high level of sincerity towards students, parents, and colleagues and also the fact that I am a truly genuine person. The person and teacher I am shows through in all that I do each day, and every person I encounter knows that “what you see is what you get.” I demand a great deal from my students but back it up with support, encouragement, and love. In my fifteen years of teaching, I am proud to say that I have never once had a conflict with a parent or admin-

istrator. I believe that is the case due to the fact that my motives and actions are clear to all—I love the students and want each and every one of them to reach his or her personal best.

My husband constantly tells me that I am so fortunate to have a job where rewards are so frequent; daily I reap the rewards of working with students. I am confident that I make a difference in the lives of my students each and every day of my life. To me, that is worth more than any amount of money or compliment from an adult that I could ever receive.

Monica Plantan
Zionsville Community Schools
Zionsville Middle School
Grade 6 Language Arts and Mathematics

“... I find that combining a student’s learning style with an area of interest leads to his/her greater self-direction and initiative.”

If one is lucky, a solitary fantasy can totally transform one million realities.

—Maya Angelou

As a child I fantasized about becoming a teacher, and it was a dream that I had no idea I might not be able to achieve. While having modest resources in small-town Midwest America somewhat limited my opportunities, the bridge between dream and reality was born of my parents’ encouragement and sacrifice, teachers and other mentors who believed in me, and my own hard work and determination.

That humble beginning was indeed a gift that affects my decisions, my values, and my teaching. I was fortunate to realize my dream of becoming a teacher, and I try to “pay it forward” by encouraging my students to define what it is they believe and why they have come to these beliefs. Understanding their own world helps them to identify potential boundaries and allows them to dream beyond what they believe is possible. I help them find and/or refine their passions, and, in doing so, I connect with them on a personal level.

Transformative learning is not always based in instruction. I believe it is empowering students to take responsi-

bility for their own learning; inspiring intellectual, social, and emotional growth; fostering risk-taking and curiosity; and effecting change when necessary. Transformative teaching, therefore, requires that I listen to and observe my students, answer their questions and ask them questions in return, and respect and implement their ideas. While providing a safe, nurturing learning environment, I also must be dynamic in my methodology, always searching for novel ways to reach students. Important skills can be woven into content for which one has an affinity, and I find that combining a student’s learning style with an area of interest leads to his/her greater self-direction and initiative. Additionally, I believe that this metacognition can help students juggle the many components of today’s classroom, including content standards, digital age literacy, 21st Century skills, and—perhaps most important—the exploration of meaningful connections among them all. I model educational collaboration and commitment and am excited by the learning opportunities that my students and fellow educators bring to me every day. Effective teaching, just as learning, is founded in continuous growth, so to be transformative, I believe that *outstanding teaching* must always remain a goal.

The rewards of teaching come in those “realities” that we have the power to transform, and in a society of “give us bread, and give us roses,” teachers have the edge on the roses! My roses are the smiles, hugs, notes, and drawings from sixth graders who are still able to express appreciation in those “uncool” ways. My roses stop by my room as 7th and 8th graders to share that *Plantan ‘s Decimal Dance* helped them on a recent math test. My roses are the high school seniors who believe that I, as their sixth grade teacher, still know them well enough to write the best college recommendation. My roses are in the form of young men and women, often with babies in tow, who introduce me to their spouses as their favorite teacher. My roses have shown up on vacations or at restaurants in other cities, states, and even countries, to say hello and tell me about their lives... prompting my husband to muse, “Wow, it’s like I’m with a movie star!” To which I might reply, “No, my life is much richer,”... at least in roses, if not in bread!

I am indeed lucky, and while I have yet to transform one million realities, I am grateful and honored to be in a profession that allows me to work at it every day.

Marlene Plemmons
North Gibson School Corporation
Brumfield Elementary School
Grade 5

*"A good teacher cannot just stay within the individual classroom
but must constantly learn from the educators around her."*

It has been my privilege to teach in the North Gibson School Corporation for my entire teaching career. I have been able to grow as a teacher and constantly find the best educational plan for my students. Education is very important in our community and I am highly respected as an educator. This has constantly kept my batteries recharged because I feel that I am making an impact not only in my students' lives while they are in my classroom and for the rest of their lives. I know what effect my former teachers had on me and I strive daily to do my part to help students become successful.

One of the reasons I have become a valued and requested teacher is that I have been very observant of other teaching methods, successful ones as well as unsuccessful. A good teacher cannot just stay within the individual classroom but must constantly learn from the educators around her. I always look back to my first classroom when I thought I had learned everything in my undergraduate education classes. It took about six weeks for me to see that I needed desperately to go to the teachers on either side of me for their suggestions and support. Likewise today, I make my shelves filled with educational ideas and my exper-

tise available for the new teachers to use as they see fit. I also learn so much from their exuberance and from their new fangled ideas. A good teacher must be a sponge and never feel that they have learned enough.

Teaching is such a rewarding career for me. I am able to touch many lives and they also are able to touch mine. I knew when I became a teacher my greatest reward would not be monetary. I have gained so much more than a big bank account. My rewards have come through the gratitude of my students and parents. One of the greatest compliments is to have a family request me as the teacher for their next child. I know I am doing it right and that they have confidence in my ability.

Discipline, in a non-abusive and caring manner, is crucial. I teach my children the one major goal that each one needs to set is self-control. This is the essence of a successful student and a successful classroom. I have found that the voice you use when disciplining a child comes from the heart. I work to understand their behavior and not allow it to send me into a rage.

I am a story-teller in my class daily because I know that children love to

hear a good tale. They do not know it but I teach a lot of things to them through my stories. I like to tell them accounts of my life which are sometimes happy but also sometimes sad. I want them to realize that I am human too. They need to know that I made mistakes in life but that I worked hard to succeed.

I also enjoy my job and feel that teaching is one of the hardest efforts in the world. There is no down time, no overtime, no paid vacations and especially no going on strike. I find myself waking up around 3:00 a.m. to design a lesson, figure out how to handle a particularly obstinate student, or to create a bulletin board. My mind is constantly on teaching. It is one of the few jobs that one cannot leave at the office. It is not the career for just anyone but rather for just the special ones. I feel that the really successful teachers are the ones who understand this. Once you sign that contract, you become a teacher twenty-four seven. That is the way I like it!

Rhonda Rasdorf
Northern Wells Community Schools
Lancaster Central Elementary School
Grades K-5 Science

*"I believe a teacher needs to have a 'heart' for teaching.
It's not just a job; it is the molding of young, impressionable lives."*

Every person has many teachers, some of whom you find in classrooms, others you find in life. There is so much more to teaching than just imparting book knowledge to students. It is also equipping students with the skills to be productive citizens, role models, and life-long learners. When a teacher is able to make a connection with a student; then the groundwork is laid for learning to begin. Students that feel loved, respected, and secure are willing to learn. because they know that when they can make mistakes they will not be crucified. From day one, my students know I love, trust, and respect them, have limits and expectations for them, plus I'm their advocate. My students also see my enthusiasm which effects how they see the learning. Building a relationship with each of my students is the groundwork for a learning environment to grow.

Once that groundwork is laid and the trusting relationship is formed, then teaching the academic standards takes place. I believe a teacher needs to have a "heart" for teaching. It's not just a job; it is the molding of young, impressionable lives. In that molding, we need to remember every child can learn, but at different rates.

When I taught in a regular classroom I would start building the relationship by sending my students letters, during the summer, telling them what was going to happen in our classroom and letting them know how honored I was to be their teacher. At the end of each year I would write a letter to each of my students mentioning something great they did during the year and encouraging them to do good work in middle school. When each of my fifth graders graduate from high school I send each of them a card telling them how proud I am of their accomplishments.

Now that I'm a science lab teacher I still hold this same philosophy; it's just that I'm working with every child in the school. When the students enter my lab, I greet them at the door with a smile and enthusiasm. I make them feel like they are the most important people walking into my classroom that day. I touch base with the classroom teachers when it comes to concerns or sharing praises about students. During each lab time I try to say something positive to each student. Letting the students know I believe they can succeed, encourages them to give their best effort. My students know if they make a mistake they're just one step closer to finding the

correct answer. That is part of being a life-long learner, learning from one's mistakes. Children love to get their hands dirty and see things fizz. Labs can be fun and children love doing experiments and in many cases don't even realizing they are learning. This past year I brought "Star Lab" to our school. I took each class inside the dome to observe the "night sky" and constellations. One Friday evening, during a K-2 Family Fun Night, I gave "parent tours" in Star Lab so that it might start discussions between the students and their parents about stars and space. This year the students have gotten so excited about "science". Throughout the school year students became more aware of "science"; so at recess students would find insects, bugs, and even a dead, baby snake. Yes, I became the recipient of these "treasures"!

The rewards I receive from teaching my students come in many simple forms: hugs, smiles, and kids saying they love science. It is also having former students telling me I made a difference in their lives, or seeing former students go into the teaching profession and telling me that being in my class helped in making that decision. Then there is the priceless reward of receiving invitations to high school graduations and weddings of former students. I could mention many more rewards; when these "rewards" happen. I feel like I've won the lottery.

Being a teacher is a fragile package filled with enormous responsibilities, love, and respect that is wrapped in priceless, intangible rewards, and adorned with a glittering ribbon – which is the reminder that we've had the privilege of touching the future.

“Children need to know that they do have it in their own power to ‘figure it out!’”

I do not believe that all children CAN learn. I believe that all children DO learn! In 35 years of sharing the classroom with children of all ability levels, I still marvel at the daily “a-ha!” moments that are a part of every child’s learning.

I am a firm believer that it is my responsibility to set the stage for learning. There must be an atmosphere of respect, a set of well defined (and enforced) expectations, an atmosphere of acceptance, and a positive energy present, to promote learning.

In my classroom, we have two maxims: 1) “Solve the Problem!” and 2) “How can we use what we know to figure out what we don’t know?” These two adages are applicable to both social situations as well as the academics. I am constantly modeling these behaviors and pointing out to students that they DO have the power to figure things out without an adult coming to the rescue every time. A child that moves to an activity and finds that there is no chair for them to sit on, soon learns to “solve the problem” by finding a chair and moving it instead of just standing there bemoaning “I don’t have a chair”. A child helping at the morning calendar learns quickly to apply what they already know to figure

out needed information. If the child is asked to name the current day of the week, they often quietly point and sing the “Days of the Week” song or point to the first letter of the word to figure it out instead of just staring and saying “I don’t know”. This feeling of empowerment is critical to learning. Children need to know that they do have it in their own power to “figure it out!”

I believe in maintaining high standards for my children’s academic skills and their classroom behavior.

I empower children to learn to “think”.

I continue to be a life long learner myself by reading, networking with other teachers and attending seminars and workshops.

I work to make learning fun, exciting and pertinent to their lives. I teach with contagious enthusiasm.

I think thorough planning and good organization are critical, but I maintain a flexibility that allows me to take advantage of those unforeseen “teachable moments” that crop up.

I really work to get to know my students and help each one feel special by identifying something wonderful

within each of them. It is said that “little things mean a lot”, but I think little things mean “everything”! I find that a kind word, a hug, a smile, a simple word of acknowledgement or encouragement, or just the touch of my hand can make all the difference to a child.

I love what I do! I think J.M. Barrie, author of “Peter Pan”, summed it up best when he said, “It is not in doing what you like, but in liking what you do that is the secret of happiness.”

"I believe that all students' journeys in learning are different and unique."

Since I began teaching, I have come into contact with many good teachers. The teachers whom have struck me as outstanding are those who have passion. I believe a teacher who has passion, has the ability to reach out to students, and to then, capture their attention and interest. Once achieved, a journey of learning begins.

I believe that all students' journeys in learning are different and unique. Instructional methods that are beneficial to one student may be detrimental to another. This is why it is crucial that teachers know each student's strengths, weaknesses and learning styles. This is especially true in today's classrooms. With the inclusion of students with special needs comes the realization now, more than ever, that teachers should differentiate instruction to better reach all students.

The "Team Concept" has proven very successful with teachers as well as workers in different companies and organizations around the world. I have striven to instill in my students, the value of this concept. When students feel that they are a team working, growing, and learning together, the result is a positive environment. There is nothing more inspiring and moving than to witness a high achieving

student reach out to a student with special needs by asking to read to them. Or, to have the whole class hold their breath in unison as a student awaits his final timed test to be graded. And to have the class, break out in spontaneous clapping and cheering as the student indeed passes. It is during these moments I realize, that creating a "team" environment is very worthwhile and beneficial to all students.

My personal teaching style is a reflection of the beliefs I have mentioned. I incorporate multi-level approaches while teaching Reading, Writing, Spelling, and Math. I also incorporate one-on-one time for each student. This is vital in understanding where students are academically. Also, depending on the student, this may be the only avenue that will address a misunderstanding or difficulty in learning a new concept.

Teaching and discussing character traits helps to build the team concept. These discussions occur daily. When students feel valued as part of a team and are aware of expectations, there are rarely behavior problems.

I have never really thought of myself as an "outstanding" teacher, only as a

teacher who gives her personal best in the classroom each and every day. I have high expectations of my students, while remaining aware of their different ability levels. I make an effort to know each student and their uniqueness as a person. I communicate daily with my students' parents making them aware of any positive or negative behaviors that may have occurred as well as the standards that are currently being taught. I always remain open to new ideas and suggestions by my peers that may improve my teaching style. I understand the importance of leveling instruction. I give students multiple opportunities to experience guided instruction, independent practice, remediation if necessary, and then more independent-practice activities. Using this method helps to build students' confidence as well as their overall performance and retention of new concepts.

The rewards of teaching are greater than any words that I could use to describe them. As I think of rewards very simple images appear in my mind. I will call these light bulbs, smiles, and hugs. Light bulbs are the looks on a child's face when he/she understands something for the first time. The smile on a student's face at any given moment throughout the day is always a gift. The spontaneous hug from a

student as they realize that school is a great place to be. These rewards may seem simple, but to me they are the greatest gifts of all!

Janet Roberson
South Harrison Community School Corporation
South Central Jr./Sr. High School
Grades 7-9 Special Education

“It is my belief that students must be engaged with the material being taught and feel that it is relevant to their lives.”

Teaching is an opportunity to motivate and inspire students to reach their maximum potential and explore learning opportunities with curiosity, confidence, and enthusiasm. It is my belief that a student must be engaged with the material being taught and feel that it is relevant to their lives. Students become authentically engaged when they are given the opportunity to use their prior knowledge, explore, inquire, and evaluate information and concepts which are meaningful to their own lives. A teacher must understand the needs and learning styles of each student in order to utilize differentiated instruction successfully and promote varying instructional strategies.

In the full inclusion setting at my school with special education teachers serving as co-teachers in the regular education classroom, it is essential in the success of our students for the teachers to work collaboratively on lesson planning and the instructional strategies which are utilized in the classroom. Teachers must be flexible and willing to adapt and change their teaching strategies to accommodate students needs and abilities. I attempt to meet the individual needs of each student based upon several factors, which includes academic ability and

performance levels, behavioral concerns, strengths and needs, motivation level, and availability of assistance and their outside resources at home.

As a special education teacher it is my goal to create an education program for each of my students that enhances their strengths, focuses on challenging them to reach their potential in all aspects of their academic and social experiences, and incorporates parental involvement and strong communication between school and home. The most rewarding teaching experiences for me have been those in which I have witnessed students take responsibility for their learning and build the courage to grow intellectually and academically.

My personal teaching style focuses on challenging students and building a rapport with them through an authoritative approach incorporating mutual respect and communication. Being a role model for students by showing enthusiasm about teaching and learning and demonstrating this to my students has been one of the key elements of my successes over the years. I have strived to show compassion and appreciation toward my students and want them to feel that I am truly interested and engaged in

their academic progress. I continually seek ways to improve my teaching by collaborating with other teachers, researching and experimenting with new teaching strategies and finding new and innovative instructional modifications. I attend and participate in all professional development training and assist my administrators and teachers with the school improvement process. I reflect upon my successes and the challenges that I have endured throughout my career in order to improve my teaching skills and professional growth.

"I feel that each child is a gift."

"You can pay people to teach, but you can't pay them to care."

Marva Collins (1938-)

I love my students, and I love teaching! Our faith leads us in different directions. I have always felt that teaching is what God has wanted me to do with my life. Some people go to Africa; I went to Adams Elementary.

It is very important for children to know that I truly care about them. I feel that it isn't just words but actions that mean so much to them. Before the children enter my classroom, I send them a postcard telling them that I am so glad they will be in my room. We share a box of Popsicles under a shade tree at the end of a hot first day of school in August. I have walked a child across the street to his home daily because of school traffic. I have purchased a pair of shoes and socks for a student when his were completely worn out; his parents simply did not have the money to replace them. I gave a child a teddy bear to hold when there was a death in her family. I have taken "Get Well" balloons to children when they have had their tonsils removed. These and other acts of kindness help my students know that I care all about them and their family. I feel very strongly that once the children know

that I love and care about them, they are then ready to learn.

I feel that each child is a gift. Each is wrapped differently, but inside are unique talents and strengths. I try very hard to make a difference in their lives during our short year together. I want each child to do as well as possible academically, but student successes are more than simple measurements of report card grades and future ISTEP+ scores.

I want each child to learn to be intrinsically motivated in learning. I want each child to learn to give more than is required for that will be the real reward. I want them to discover the love of reading and to become lifelong learners. I want each child to develop a sense of responsibility for their actions and their education, I want each child to treat other people the way they would like to be treated. I want each child to learn to enjoy earned praise and to know how good it feels to accomplish goals that are important. I want each child to know that I truly care about them and that I would do anything I could to help them—now and forevermore.

The culminating activity each year is my Mother's Day Program. Guests in

attendance are smiling parents and proud grandparents with cameras in hand. This program is designed to showcase student mastery of second grade standards and goals. Each child stands excitedly upon a small stage and introduces their guests and presents the perfect flower to them. Students recite self-selected poems that they had memorized for the audience's enjoyment. Then children read stories they had written about why their mothers are so special to them. Kleenex, cake, and punch conclude this special celebration. For me, the glow on their mothers' faces is second only to the priceless confidence and pride I see in the eyes of the little ones. It is my prayer that my children will take these remarkable character traits with them as they travel down life's paths.

*“I have made it part of my philosophy
to focus on the positives of each day.”*

“Why do you want to teach junior high?” I have been asked this question numerous times, from a variety of people when they find out what I do for a living. My answer? “Because every day is different and every day is rewarding.” Obviously I am not alone in my views for our nation’s classrooms are filled with men and women that have discovered the daily prizes that await them each day. There is no doubt in our minds that teaching is the most important and rewarding career on which a person may embark.

Although it may seem like an obvious and simplistic statement, the most important factor in discovering the rewards of teaching is to look for them. Unfortunately, it is much easier to focus on the negative when reflecting on the day’s events. We find ourselves upset about the student that caused a ruckus in class or the lesson that didn’t work out, and while we do need to address these issues from day to day, we cannot let them dominate our time. I have made it part of my philosophy to focus on the positives of each day. I look for the parts of the lessons that went well so that I can duplicate their success in the future. I figure out which kids “clicked” with the instruction that day so that I can continue to reach them. I have also learned that it

takes experience to understand when a student has had a good day in my classroom. We don’t live in a “Pollyanna” world where each kid is going to walk out of the class with a gigantic smile on his or her face (although it is wonderful when they do). Like adults, our students show their appreciation in various ways. Sometimes it is simply that a kid says, “See you tomorrow.” From a normally quiet student, this is a sign that the day was a good one. I may know that a lesson was hit simply because a student did the work that was assigned without having to be told to get started a few times. Once a teacher has been able to understand and appreciate the joys that can be found in every day’s events, then he or she is on the way to becoming an outstanding teacher.

The next step that I feel is imperative is to infuse that optimism into the classroom. I truly believe that students need to see how much fun I am having with them. If they know that I am excited about the day, then they will be to. I am sure to talk up every lesson and activity that we are about to begin. When finished, I debrief with the students to point out all of the positive things that I saw occur. I even point out my optimism with a couple of assignments we do.

In the first week of the year, I have my students create a vision statement in which they reflect on what is important to them and set goals for various aspects of their lives. As I am modeling this assignment, I share my vision statement with them. Two of my goals are: “Laugh with my students every-day” and “Smile”. By pointing these out in the first week, my students begin to see my positive outlook come through in the classroom.

Another assignment occurs when we are focusing on theme. I ask each student to find his or her own personal theme song. Obviously I share mine with them before they get started. I play Neil Diamond’s “I’m Alive” in class and break down why it fits my personality. The basic gist of the song is that there are negative things to be found in the world but we should not overlook the positive—the biggest being the fact that we are alive to experience all of the basic joys of life. I then am sure to tell the kids that they and teaching are two of these joys for me.

The third aspect of being an outstanding teacher is that I make sure that the days and weeks are filled with a variety of activities and topics that can reach all learners. We all know that everyone learns differently, but unfortunately some teachers don’t teach differently. We have to step

outside of our comfort zones so that we appeal to all students. Of course it is impossible to reach every kid with every lesson, but by employing different strategies and keeping the pace moving, then the students will learn that if they are currently doing something that they don’t necessarily like, it’s okay because a new experience will be just around the corner.

The most rewarding aspect of teaching is—teaching! Enjoying every facet of this wonderful profession is what it takes to succeed. Infusing my students with enthusiasm and optimism will hopefully inspire kids to not only love school, but maybe even enter into the profession themselves.

*“When I have the chance to watch students create
I can easily see that learning is taking place.”*

All children can learn, however all children do not learn the same way. I am a prime example. As an adult I continue to struggle with reading comprehension and yet numbers are a breeze. As I developed my musical abilities I found that I am a creative and smart person but school did not always make me feel that way. I have developed my philosophy based on my own experiences in school and I know that every child needs to feel that they are smart, creative, and that they have something important to offer!

My room is much more than a music room. My room is a place that encourages students to take risks, problem solve, think about many options and then decide which one works best. In the early years, grades K-3, we spend lots of time exploring many different ways to sing, move, play instruments, and dance. Within these games, students are often unaware of the learning that is occurring. In the later years, grades 4-5, lessons include more theory and students are expected to put their learned skills into action and create their own music. The purpose of Orff Schulwerk is to create musically independent children. They own the music and they make decisions about how it is put together and how it is to be performed.

When Howard Gardner’s “Multiple Intelligences” became popular I was ecstatic because that idea was already going on in Orff Schulwerk classes across the country. If you were to walk into my classroom on any given day you would be able to see at least five of the intelligences at work. The music intelligence is a given, but along with it you will see the verbal-linguistic intelligence hard at work as we work with language and poetry daily. We create poems and manipulate words to make rhythms more natural and accessible to young children. You will see the logical-mathematical intelligence in action as we compare rhythmic notation and, with older students, move into fractions and the beat relationships of rhythmic values.

Almost every lesson includes movement related to the form or the style of the music being studied. Students use their bodily-kinesthetic intelligence through creative movement, learning dances, and creating dances appropriate to the music at hand. We often break into groups where students can develop their interpersonal intelligence to create a classroom performance based on the concept of the day. Although we do a great deal of group work, students often have their own musical experience and eventually compose on their

own in the upper grades where they can utilize their intrapersonal intelligence through reflection and composition.

Music, along with all other subjects, must be active. Sitting and listening will often just go in one ear and out the other. When I have the chance to watch students create I can easily see that learning is taking place. When a student can give reasons for his or her music choices and defend those choices to other students in a respectful way they are way beyond just “going to music class,” they are experiencing music enrichment. I pray that what occurs in my classroom is enriching the lives of every student that walks through my door!

Overall, my philosophy is to teach the whole child and give students a safe and fun environment in which to learn. Along with music, I teach respect for others and respect for the students themselves. We, as teachers, must treat all students as if they were our own children. We must find their learning styles and find ways to motivate them to learn so they can become a generation of adults that will ultimately enrich our society as a whole.

Susan Tomlinson
Franklin Township Community School Corporation
Franklin Central High School
Grades 9-12 Social Studies

“If students know that you genuinely care about them, there is a level of trust that opens their minds to what you have to teach them.”

One day during my third year of teaching, Mary Jo, a quiet, A-level student, handed me the following newspaper clipping: *“I am a child, You hold in your hand my destiny. You determine, largely, whether I succeed or fail. Give me, I pray you, Those things that make for happiness. Train me, I beg you, That I may be a blessing to the world. Anonymous.”* This has directed my efforts as a teacher ever since. While it was Mary Jo’s way of letting me know how much she valued learning, I saw this as a message from *all* students to *all* teachers. I decided to believe that this is truly the inner desire of all of my students. It is a great responsibility with which we are tasked, and regardless of what we see and hear, positive and negative, from our students, parents, administrators, community and government, we must never lose sight of the importance of our far-reaching influence as teachers. This message is forever inscribed in my memory. With this in mind, my philosophy of teaching can be summed up in four statements.

We need to keep at the forefront of our motivations the importance of our mission as educators. Never underestimate the influence you have to teach a child skills, subject matter

and lessons that will empower them for life. Maybe some day those students will tell you how you made a difference. Maybe they won’t. But know that we DO. We may get tired. We may get discouraged. But we have the power to change lives in wonderful ways, and we do this, whether we realize it or not. Know this: Sometimes the success stories are written on the heart and not on the report card.

If we want students to succeed in a course, there must be a positive experiential connection to the subject matter. As a history and geography teacher, I work to get my students involved in *seeing* the past and the current world through the eyes of those who have lived or are living it. We learn about the facts, figures, and folks, but then we try to walk in their shoes, figuratively and literally. Panel discussions, role playing, dress up, deliberations, online exchanges, field trips and lots of reading and writing are just a few of the ways we accomplish this. Most recently my students created a persona, someone they would “be” as we studied the war in Vietnam. As we covered different periods of the war, students were charged with writing their reactions (as their created persona) to various events (the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, the Tet

Offensive, reading a play by a Vietnam vet who is a friend of mine). This was a much more personal way to apply what they had learned in class, and it allowed them to explore more deeply the various issues surrounding the war.

They don't care what you know until they know that you care. All teachers have heard this, and it rings true every day in the classroom. One of the *keys* to being an outstanding teacher is *caring*. If students know that you genuinely care about them, there is a level of trust that opens their minds to what you have to teach them. Each year I ask my students to write an essay that includes what they want me to know about them. I refer to these throughout the year, and it helps me make connections, such as asking about the new baby sister, the bowling tournament, or Mom's chemo treatments. I DO care, and this helps me help my students.

We're all in this together. Teachers, students, aides, subs, bus drivers, counselors, custodians, lunch ladies, administrators, parents, community members, political leaders—we're a team and a support group. We need to know that it is the responsibility of all of us to reinforce and foster in all children a desire for a good education. When someone doesn't do their part, we don't use it as an excuse for why we

can't do what we need to do. We simply need to roll up our sleeves, link arms with our colleagues, and move forward, ever mindful of the importance of our role as teachers of all children. Teaching has many rewards, but for me the greatest reward is knowing that, as a team, we take care when holding in *our* hands *their* destiny.

Kevin Van Note
Richmond Community Schools
Julia E. Test Middle School
Grades 7 and 8 Music

"I build a 'classroom culture' that is inviting, respectful, and fun."

To me, teaching is all about the wonderful feeling I get from watching others achieve great feats with my guidance and help. It's all about the intrinsic value. We should be in this profession because we love to work with people and we believe we can improve their lives through the study of whatever it is we teach. Moreover, we as teachers should be lifelong learners, continually striving to enhance our teaching practices and strengthen our profession.

I believe I am considered an outstanding teacher mostly because of my ability to motivate and interact with young people. First and foremost, I care about my students and they know it. I care about how they feel, who they are, and what they want to be. I build a "classroom culture" that is inviting, respectful, and fun. My humorous nature and energetic behavior add to this culture and students respond very well to me.

Like all outstanding teachers, I have high expectations for my students and I will not settle for mediocre student performance. I find that when high expectations are set by a teacher, not only do students rise to the occasion, but they feel an immense sense of

accomplishment and pride in their work. For example, my middle school choir often sings a very difficult repertoire and my rehearsals are long and intense with very little down-time. When they hear the responses from audience members and judges, they are thankful to have been pushed so hard.

Teaching offers me many rewards. The greatest reward comes from knowing that I am doing something positive and beneficial in our community. I feel a great sense of satisfaction and pride knowing that I am a positive influence on countless young people. Moreover, these same young people are a positive influence on me. They keep me feeling young and energetic. They inspire me and push me to constantly improve my teaching practices and musical ability.

My beliefs about teaching are demonstrated in my personal style everyday when I interact with students. Each day I begin my class with a quote and a riddle. Often during these first crucial minutes of class, the quotes and riddles spark student discussion about issues that are important to them. I express interest in their thoughts and ideas and attempt to teach them more than just music.

Students in my classes take charge of their own learning and set their own goals, knowing that their ideas and opinions are important. Often I have varied levels of performance-based materials from which my students may choose. I provide them with ideal conditions for success and show them anything can be accomplished with hard work and dedication.

I consider myself a life-long learner. I am always looking for new activities, new music, and new teaching and rehearsing techniques. I am very passionate about my subject, and I believe I am very influential in showing students the aesthetic value music holds and how it can positively impact their lives.

"I want my enthusiasm to disseminate throughout my classroom, school, and community, creating a climate of excitement for knowledge."

Recipe to T.E.A.C.H.

From the classroom of Mrs. Michelle Webb

Ingredients

5 lb. bag of **TEAMWORK**
3 cups of **ENTHUSIASM**
1 can of **ATTITUDE**
1 stick of **CREATIVITY**
8 oz. of **HANDS-ON LEARNING**

First, combine enthusiasm and attitude when setting up the classroom. Understand the importance of these ingredients and let stand to create the proper temperament. Second, blend in teamwork. Use all necessary components of the classroom family and extended family to realize the importance of **all** involved in making students successful. Drizzle units with creativity and uniqueness. Next, immerse the students in an environment that provides Hands-on learning. Fold in the different learning styles. Mix together to reveal talent in children they never imagined. Observe as students reach beyond their abilities and rise to exceed expectations. Serve generously and make the world a better place.

What makes these ingredients so special?

TEAMWORK is vital. A united team is a successful team. I start when my families walk in the door by letting them know that we're in this together and this isn't MY classroom, it is OUR classroom. Teamwork in the classroom doesn't only mean students working with students. It is a multi-dimensional network of teams involving student, teacher, parents, colleagues, school, and home. It is imperative these teams function as a cohesive unit to make learning effectual. The teacher's involvement, either directly or indirectly, with these teams ensures success.

ENTHUSIASM is contagious! Children should be energized and excited by the classroom, curriculum, teacher, and environment in which they learn. I embrace ideas, espouse individualism, and encourage participation. I want my enthusiasm to disseminate throughout my classroom, school, and community, creating a climate of excitement for knowledge.

ATTITUDE is fundamental. Greeting students at the door with a handshake, a hug, or a high five is one way to show you care. I assure students that within the walls of our classroom they will be respected, loved, and appreciated. Attitude is the part of teaching that I

call teaching with your heart and not your head. Changing statements like “Do I have to?” and replacing them with “Do I GET to?” is another way to demonstrate the positive attitude that permeates the walls of my classroom.

CREATIVITY is indispensable. Allowing imaginations to blossom can lead to the exploration of ideas and thoughts that may otherwise be suppressed or neglected. I captivate the learners and design units of study that grab attention and motivate students to be involved and engaged. Creativity and imagination lead a child beyond the confines of the classroom.

HANDS-ON LEARNING is a necessity. Involving the children completely transports them beyond the black and white of text. I understand different learning styles and embrace the differences in our classroom to stimulate students through the ways they learn best. Whatever unit we are studying in our classroom, we will be singing it, reading it, moving to it, and creating it. Differentiating for all level learners with varied instruction is critical. As all good recipes go, you need to get just the right pinch of this and dash of that for the perfect masterpiece. That’s what I do, lbs. of **TEAM-WORK**, cups of **ENTHUSIASM**, sticks

of **CREATIVITY**, ounces of **HANDS-ON LEARNING**, and smother it in a can of **ATTITUDE**.

Bon Appetite! Mrs. Michelle Webb

Kathy Wertz
Prairie Heights Community School Corporation
Prairie Heights Middle School
Grade 5 Mathematics

*"I expect all of my students to be emotionally connected
in positive ways to the levels of instruction planned."*

As I think back to my required undergraduate and graduate classes, I am amazed at the number of philosophy courses I have taken. From Maslov's Hierarchy of Needs to Piaget, from John Dewey to Albert Einstein and others, I remember wondering how their ideas would in turn affect MY students. Now I know that one's philosophy is based more on personal background experiences, previous knowledge, and attitude which forms the foundation of one's feelings and beliefs about teaching and children. With all that said, I have come to embrace the philosophy of differentiation because of its positive impact on the academic achievement for ALL of my students.

The philosophy of differentiation has a premise "one size does not fit all." One method of instruction will not meet the needs of all learners. A variety of strategies must be implemented if the "light bulb" is to ever "go on" in the minds of students. Whether using Curriculum Compacting, which allows students who have mastered a skill *prior to* instruction to use class time to extend, enrich, or accelerate their mathematical understanding, or offering choices in a great many areas, whether "tiering" assignments, or creating authentic assessments,

students soon realize that this classroom is all about honoring individual differences in learning. "Fair does not mean equal" is stressed early on in the school year and is established as a routine for the daily procedures set forth. Each new skill is purposefully taught with diversity in mind. Therefore, it is not unusual for a visitor to hear singing, to see movement, to experience manipulatives, to participate in collaborative processing, to draw or cut or glue, to journal, to "dissect words" commonly used, to brainstorm various plans for finding solutions, to learn from others, to emphasize life skills and learning habits, to visualize, verbalize, and kinesthetically experience each new concept in a way that develops sense and meaning for the long haul. Though it may look like a "three ring circus" to the outsider, there is no chaos, no unrehearsed procedure, no low expectation for success, no unsafe activity, no shame in "wrong" responses, no wasting of valuable learning time. Though it may look like a "party" to the outsider, there is an anticipation of fun with laughter, a curiosity of "something new," a connection to be made, a pattern to be experienced, a choice to be made, a "brain friendly" approach to all instruction, a celebration of learning. I expect all of my

students to be emotionally connected in positive ways to the levels of instruction planned. My greatest reward... students leaving the classroom wanting more, students “surprised” when the bell rings, students “talking about crazy Mrs. Wertz” at lunch, students thanking me for the positive postcard received in the mail, students “hanging out” with me instead of going to lunch, students sharing “sad” times with me, students passing the math portion of ISTEP as 6th graders who have never passed before, students who “risk” giving a response because of the “safe” environment they “feel,” students who believe I drink a “whole can of Mountain Dew” before class starts.

I have been blessed with a wonderful role model who exemplifies my own personal teaching style and that of differentiation in one sweet “package.” Her name is Mary Poppins. She has the unique ability to turn the ordinary into the extra-ordinary by taking the “chore”, the mundane, the job, and turning it into a “*jolly holiday*” so that all have a “chalk pavement” experience. It is true that “a *spoonful of sugar*” does help the “*medicine go down*.” That “sugar” might be music. It might be an art project; it might be physical movement; it might be poetry; it might be exploring the environment; it might be technology; it might be a game. Over the years, I have discovered that for many, math is awful, a

“chore” to be tolerated, hurried through, with no expectation of enjoyment, success, or reward. My goal is to teach in such a way as to change that mindset.

“*Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious*” is all I want to hear.

“... I will do whatever it takes to make sure my students learn.”

The teaching profession is a combination of many things. As a teacher I am an artist of presentation, substitute parent, judge of classroom crimes, coach of academic achievements, special event coordinator, nurse of everyday aches and pains, and accountant of book orders, lunch accounts, and field trip fees. It is many occupations rolled into one purpose: to serve with a love for students and learning. That is my purpose and it is where I find the rewards for all my efforts.

The requirement of me to manage so many occupations within one classroom demands a teaching style of flexibility. My classroom has a general routine and order, but I'm not afraid to step out of the daily grind to incorporate a wonderful learning experience. I am constantly monitoring my students for their understanding of the topic at hand. If they don't "get it" I teach it again in a different way. If they still do not comprehend the topic or skill, I try again.

Phenomenal teaching is not an everyday occurrence. There are many great teachers in our profession, but it takes a lifetime of experiences to reach a phenomenal status. That is why I don't claim to be the best. What a ridiculous

thing to say in a Teacher of the Year application, but it's true. I can reflect on every lesson I teach and find areas for improvement. I usually feel that I will never get it exactly right, but I will never stop trying. I will also never claim to have all the answers because sometimes I exhaust all my efforts.

What makes me different is I don't have prideful setbacks in trying to find ways that work with my students. I have resource books and wonderful colleagues around me who might just give me a new way of looking at things. I'm not afraid to go find what I need even if that means asking for help. In doing so, I also build relationships with other staff members. This also opens a door for them to approach me if they think I may be able to guide them in return.

My favorite form of instruction is true think-aloud modeling. Some teachers spend time planning polished lessons assuming students will be able to complete the given task with a few instructions. I never assume they already know anything. If I want them to follow a certain process, I model the process for them in writing, reading, and math. You cannot spout out directions or shout out answers expecting the students to truly learn. You

must model the process, give them an opportunity to try, and then model how to learn from their mistakes. The strategy ensures students are not left wondering why they have gotten a wrong answer. They are able to clarify their understanding instead of being left in a state of confusion.

Another form of instruction you will see in my room is small group teaching. It's nearly impossible to hold the full attention of twenty-seven fifth graders for longer than a few minutes. This is why I choose to teach or re-teach the most important skills in small groups. It provides more opportunities for all students to be part of meaningful discussions and it gets me closer to the goal of fully meeting all of my students' needs.

Management is the secret in any classroom for learning to take place. This takes a combination of consistency and relationship. I try to be consistent with my discipline and fair in my tactics from student to student. It is critical to follow consistent guidelines, but I also try to build connections with each of my students. I have found that if the students know you respect them as individuals, they will respect you as their authority figure. I don't want them to follow the rules because they know they are obligated; my desire is for them to WANT to follow the rules because they want to learn.

My personal philosophy of education comes down to telling myself that I will do whatever it takes to make sure my students learn. I will attempt to pass on my drive to other professionals around me and I will not settle for less than great teaching strategies in my own classroom. All too often, educators treat the classroom as one stop in some assembly line known as education. Students are not identical pieces of metal on which we can stamp the knowledge and send them down the line. My role is to identify the unique characteristics in each student and guide each child to the sources of knowledge they need to be successful. In doing so, I will help produce students who will become successful citizens of society and who will pass on the risk taking, driving force behaviors I hope to give them.

*“The overall goal is to help students develop a thirst for knowledge
and a lifelong love of learning.”*

Imagine being given the opportunity to change careers in the middle of your life. After being offered a receptionist job at GM shortly after moving to Indiana, I realized that I could not imagine having another profession other than teaching. There is no place I'd rather be than teaching students, developing a strong, positive relationship with them, and helping to make a difference in their lives. Teaching is my passion and what I believe God has called me to do.

There are so many aspects about a teacher that make him/her outstanding. An outstanding teacher first and foremost must respect and genuinely care about each student and refrain from partiality. Once students know that a teacher truly cares about them, they then are more open to learning new things. One of the greatest gifts I can bestow upon my students is to encourage them to believe in themselves and thereby bolster their self-esteem. This creates an ideal atmosphere for learning in which all students can experience some measure of success.

I feel it is important for teachers to look for areas in all students in which they can succeed and deserve praise. Through observations, assessments,

discussions, as well as personal interactions with students, I seek to determine students' strengths and weaknesses. I then applaud each student's accomplishments that reflect his best efforts and work with him to improve weak areas.

Furthermore, I seek to convey the material to be taught in an interesting manner by varying the way it is presented. Moreover, I look for ways to help students make connections and help them see how they can apply what they are learning to their everyday lives through interactive activities and discussions that students can relate to; this takes much planning, creativity, and organization, but it is well worth it. The overall goal is to help students develop a thirst for knowledge and a lifelong love of learning.

In addition, I believe it's important to inject humor in the classroom. Humor is an invaluable way to help students learn to deal with stresses of everyday life. Laughter and joy are like medicine, so I strive to give my students a daily dose. I also readily laugh at myself as the situation demands, hopefully modeling for students to do the same.

As I look back through the years, I realize that one of the things I enjoy most about teaching is watching students blossom and grow in so many different aspects throughout the year. One of my greatest desires is to see students grow to become “problem solvers.” This is one area that I particularly stress with my students. Frequently students in my 2nd grade gifted class have found most things they have previously encountered up to now fairly easy. Thus, they will often get frustrated as they approach something that is difficult for them for the first time. I encourage students to believe in themselves because they are “I Can Kids!” not “I Can’t Kids.”

It’s exciting to see students learn to rely on their own abilities because the satisfaction that results is exhilarating. They are so proud of themselves when they realize they CAN do it on their own. On the other hand, it’s also important for students to learn not to be overly critical of themselves when they don’t get everything right the first time they make an attempt. Therefore, I also seek to help students learn to give themselves permission to fail, but not give up. Perseverance is such an important character quality that I strive to help students develop.

Developing positive relationships with students and parents is a reward like none other. I readily utilize volunteers

in my classroom, thereby developing a strong rapport with parents and fostering a team relationship. Having students and parents return to express appreciation to you, remembering all the way back to their 2nd grade year, is the greatest joy of all.

Rebecca L. Wright
Garrett-Keyser-Butler Community School Corporation
Garrett High School
Grade 11 English

*"I try to emphasize that the learning is not about the content
but the skill involved."*

We have all heard the phrase, "To teach is to touch a life forever." Some might read this and move on, but every educator must come to the realization that this phrase concisely states the responsibility teaching carries with it. This short statement is why I believe that education is the highest calling to which a person can dedicate himself. Because educators touch young lives and affect them for eternity, they carry an extra measure of accountability.

It is so easy to lull oneself into a monotony of routine when one is a teacher. There is a somewhat seamless transition for many that occur upon graduation from college. A person can effectively end one semester as the student and begin the next as the teacher with little other interruption to the schedule and routine of the life he has always known. Though the duties of the school day change, the routine of life remains strikingly similar. Because of this, each educator has the obligation to continually remember that each lesson and each comment carries the possibility of being remembered for a lifetime. Each face is a mind and a soul that has been entrusted to the care of the specific teacher. One never knows when he might crush a soul or lift it from the depths.

Each day as I drive to school, I pray two things: that I will not embarrass God and that I will remember that each student was chosen by Him to be in my room. My hope is that in remembering this, I will also remember my responsibility that I am not to simply survive until the bell rings at the close of a day: I am to live, to teach, and to touch each life because the reality is, I may not get an opportunity other than the day in front of me. Whether this makes me "excellent," I cannot say. My students are the ones who can answer this question. This practice does make me accountable and in being accountable to myself and to my God, I remember the responsibility entrusted unto me.

I stated earlier that I know I was chosen to be a teacher. The truth is I often feel selfish because I enjoy my position so much. I enjoy watching my students learn. I love to see their faces when a lesson brings learning to life. The satisfaction I gain knowing a strategy has allowed them to master a skill is overwhelming. I try to emphasize that the learning is not about the content but the skill involved.

My friends ask why I repeatedly get up each morning at 5:00 when I could be

editing a newspaper or magazine and sleeping until 7:30 or 8 AM. The truth is I know I was chosen to be a teacher and that gives me purpose each day I wake up. Getting up at 5 AM is not always easy, but my job always makes it worth it.

Patricia Zeck
Northwestern School Corporation
Northwestern High School
Grades 9-12 Biology and Chemistry

*"I try to have enough activities so that I am excited
and no one will be bored."*

Although many of my friends have already retired, they comment, "You'll never retire. You love it too much." Science always has something new to offer to students for their consideration, discussion, and ultimate decision. Over half of what I teach did not even exist when I was in college. Consequently I read all the time to stay abreast of the latest developments. I had my master's degree by age 22 and then began to teach biology and zoology. I added an equivalent "sixth year" with courses in marine biology, nuclear biology and chemistry, environmental studies, and physics. Everything I studied added new dimensions and supplements to my lesson examples and labs. Despite periodic purging, I have filled four filing cabinets and have overflowed into cabinet drawers to store lesson materials.

After my children were born, summer educational development took a different turn with family types of environmental studies such as the National Wildlife Foundation Conservation Summits. One or two day workshops were more practical in the school year. After the children were in college, I reverted to weeklong conferences in areas such as human genetics and effects of climbing Pikes Peak on human physiology. All the information

kept getting intertwined into the lessons. Once after I had been absent to take care of sick children, a student said, "You can't ever be absent that long again. A sub can give the lesson but no one can give your stories." The stories and examples help the student remember and apply the lessons. An assistant principal described my instruction as "bell to bell." There is no time to sit around. We have cultures to check, plants to water, labs to do, and research to investigate.

Basically I try to integrate as many different methods and strategies to achieve a lesson as I can find or create. My anatomy class two years ago used to beg for word finds. I told them it took me four hours to create one at their level, type it, and check it. They still wanted them to help review the critical vocabulary. We began to make it a game as I would type the essential word bank and the supplementary words that naturally fall into the puzzle. Their mission was to see how many more words existed that I did not type. They were off and running. They knew that every letter was used at least once and often more than once. How much more pleasant and instructional the vocabulary became rather than a laundry list of words to know. I try to have enough activities so that I

am excited and no one will be bored. With sufficient variety, any student of any ability can pass biology if he/she puts forth the effort. Many years ago an extremely slow young man struggled to learn. For some reason, DNA clicked for him and he aced the test. He drawled, "I learned one thing in here. Ya gotta take the notes." He did learn and his success was just as gratifying as the many science fair awards my students have won.

A basic reason why my teaching is successful is the amount of time I take to prepare lessons and assessments. My work ethic keeps me busy both at school and at home for hours after the students are gone. I read their term papers for both science and grammar/composition. My work as an associate editor helps me help them to improve writing skills. Indeed, the senior AP English teacher once remarked that she could tell which students had had my class. One senior stated that she used to worry about term papers. Now she says she can research anything and write the required paper. My own children have said that their research in both music and business follows the same pattern as science projects. The topic merely changes. Students will gain a broad base in whatever science I teach to them. The carryover will be the application of that information to wise decision-making and betterment of their field to help their families and

mankind. When I see how much my students have accomplished and won over the years, I have rewards money could never bring.